



Coconuts  
finding them everywhere



First chest



Larson

## On Dorothy Parker, Gorilla Masks, and a Very Close Call

A few months before *The Far Side* made its formal debut, I was sitting in the San Francisco office of my editor-to-be, Stan Arnold, the head honcho at Chronicle Features Syndicate. And Stan, studying my meager portfolio, suddenly asked me if I would consider doing a strip. (Comic, not the dance.)

I was terrified. *The Far Side* comic strip? I had a single-image brain; I drew single-image cartoons. My primary influences had been Gahan Wilson and B. Kliban, both masters of the panel form who also spoke to my own sense of humor. There were a handful of others: George Booth, Edward Gorey, and the indisputable Charles Atlas of dark humor, Charles Addams. Nary a strip cartoonist in the bunch. I was doomed.

When it came to strips, for me, there was really only Don Martin of *Mad* magazine. Martin was not only a god to a lot of kids of my generation, he was a cartoonist's cartoonist. (Not only were his ideas often hysterical, the guy could just plain *draw*.) And I was no Don Martin. For that matter, I wasn't even Gary Larson; I was just an eager-to-please lump of self-doubt sitting in some editor's office.

Truth is, I've always been sort of in awe of comic strips. I used to think, How do those guys do it? As a kid, I always had a fondness for *Alley Oop*, and later on I consistently enjoyed the work of a couple of my contemporaries, Bill Watterson (*Calvin and Hobbes*) and Berkeley Breathed (*Bloom County*). But I could never get inside the *heads* of strip cartoonists, even the ones I liked. Clearly, I was wired differently.

I haven't reflected on any of this until now, but I believe I may have come up with a theory—just a theory—on why, for me, a single-panel cartoon was so natural, while the thought of drawing and writing a strip struck terror in my heart. As it seems so much does in life, it boils down to this: the way I was raised.

Imagine your own father sitting at the Algonquin Round Table, surrounded by that famous group of New York intellectuals. Would he most likely attempt to use his verbal alacrity and facile mind to impress and entertain everyone? Or would he find a quiet moment and simply lean over and ask Dorothy Parker to pull his finger? (Sorry, Dad, but I know the answer to this one.)

In short, the Larson Round Table was not a place where sharp dialogue and witticisms abounded. They happened, of course, and I hasten to add that wit was especially my mother's strong suit. But in reality you didn't fear a verbal put-down as much as you feared someone slipping a small invertebrate into your glass of milk while your head was

turned. It wasn't a witty retort that ensured your survival; it was good peripheral vision.

What I'm clumsily trying to say here is that, like the famous folks who once lunched at the Algonquin, most strip cartoonists (in my opinion, at least) approach their work from an appreciation of wit. And wit, of course, is the reflection of an agile and creative mind. Or, as my dictionary says, "a talent for banter." What's relevant to me, as a cartoonist, is what that implies: If you're striving to be witty, then you need banter, and if you need banter, you need a strip. You need characters like a sitcom needs them, talking to one another, setting things up, leading to that rimshot in the last panel when something clever or unexpected is said. (Okay, I know there are exceptions to any formula; I'm just firing some broadsides here.)

Wit, I think, grows out of a conscious desire to make someone else laugh, to be entertaining, to be liked. (I mean, why else make the effort?) A sense of humor, on the other hand, has to do with what makes *us* laugh. It's that largely unconscious, reactionary "funny bone" we all possess (well, most of us, anyway), and it struggles to exercise any self-control. (All of us, I'm sure, have a memory of trying not to laugh at a time we sensed was inappropriate.) The two undoubtedly overlap, but my gut tells me these are different animals leading separate lives, except when they might run into each other at some water hole in our brains. (Note: Never see a neurologist who uses this kind of terminology.)

Our sense of humor obviously didn't "burst" on the scene one day; it's been carved into our respective brains during all our formative years, eventually becoming as much a part of us as our eye color. Wit, on the other hand, is living in the moment. It's out on the dance floor, twirling, kicking, showing its moves—everyone's watching, either in admiration or embarrassment. Sense of humor is lurking in the shadows, secretly hoping that Wit falls into the punch bowl.

I'm not out on that dance floor. I'm a lurker. I draw—and draw from—my family's sense of humor. If you would allow me any talent, it's simply this: I can, for whatever reason, reach down into my own brain, feel around in all the mush, find and extract something from my persona, and then graft it onto an idea. I guess it's a Little Jack Horner kind of thing, only I fully admit it was not always a plum I pulled out—there are things down there I probably should have jerked my hand away from as soon as I made contact. Too late now.

Physical comedy—especially if it contained psychological overtones, such as those old chestnuts fear and humiliation—pervaded our home like a poltergeist. Around any corner, in any room, humor lurked, waiting to pounce. Not "Stooge" humor, I assure you. Research,

observation, psychology, biology—these were the tools, usually applied with deathly nuance, that one used in the quest to amuse oneself. For me, it was all *Far Side* boot camp. Study your prey, approach carefully, savor the moment, and then strike. (Truthfully, I was more often the “prey” in these training exercises, but I nonetheless could appreciate the skill involved.)

A single drawing is all I ever needed. I rarely required a series of panels to set up a “gag” or a punch line. In fact, I never thought in terms of punch lines and gags. I never thought of myself as a “joke writer” with a drawing attached. Maybe that’s what I was doing, in some people’s minds. But to me, *The Far Side* was more of an attitude, a distillation of life that came from growing up in a family that had a deep, sincere appreciation for the many uses of a good gorilla mask. (It was kept on the shelf in the coat closet, for quick access.)

For me, that little rectangle I drew in was the equivalent of a canvas. I needed to stare at it for a while and try to “see” as much as I could before things began. The thought of storyboarding an idea just sounded like a lot of work, and it flat out didn’t interest me. (Besides, I could never get the characters to look exactly the same from one little box to the next.)

Back to my meeting with Stan. (God, have I digressed.)

So I’m sitting there in his office, sweating. And he was going on, explaining about the strengths that comic strips held over panels. “People like to see characters they recognize,” he said. It was the old familiarity-breeds-fondness thing. Strips engage the reader in a more intimate way, like an old friend who comes by to visit every day or so. And that leads to reader loyalty. Single-panel cartoons are like strangers that suddenly appear on your doorstep. No one flings open their door for strangers. However, if you look out and see good ol’ Charlie Brown, it’s like, why sure—open the door! C’mon in, Charlie! ... Hey, wait! Quick! ... Shut the door! There’s a damn cow out there!

So once you’ve got your character established in the hearts and minds of readers, it’s not a good idea to run him over with a truck a few weeks later. Whoa! I was not going to be good at developing a character. I was not going to be good at developing a strip. I was not going to be good at telling a joke in visual form. I was hit and run. My ever-changing characters got crunched, speared, shot, beheaded, eaten, stuffed, poisoned, and run over about twice a week. (Tastefully, of course.)

And yet another layer was added to the discussion when Stan said that strips were easier to *sell*. This was, I assumed, a big one. Newspapers, he said, really weren’t thrilled with single-panel cartoons. Strips are easy to format on a comics page; single panels just throw the whole design out of whack. My cartoons might be funny, he encouraged, but couldn’t I just

transfer my sense of humor over to a strip format? (Maybe that's when I should have asked him to pull my finger.)

Well, I sat there in Stan's office, listening to him describe the virtues of a strip, the headaches with a panel. I didn't say much (certainly nothing "witty"). Stan, I recall, wasn't really even looking at me; he was just flipping through my portfolio, talking about the wonders of comic strips, while clearly feeling me out about developing one strong, returning character. I just listened, smiling on the outside, dying on the inside.

And then, out of the blue, he said, "Well, let's just go ahead and do it your way." And that's the last time a comic strip was ever discussed. Believe me, I never felt such a whoosh of relief.

On December 31, 1979, *The Far Side*—a single-panel cartoon—was launched. I was crunching, spearing, shooting, beheading, eating, stuffing, poisoning, and running over my own characters within a week.

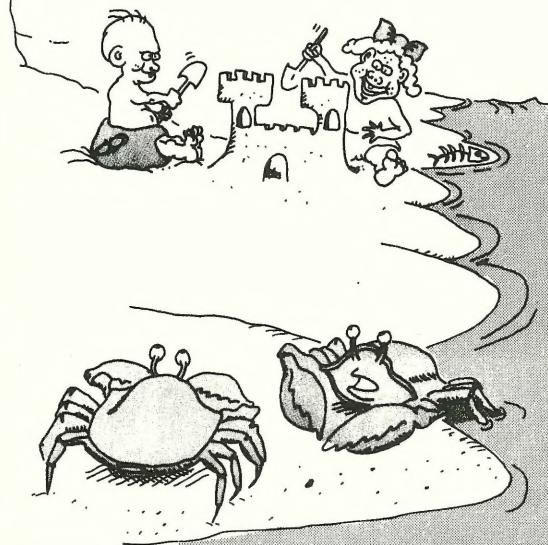
Tastefully, of course.



"Gee, Mom! Andy was just showing us how far he could suck his lip into the bottle!"

1/1/80

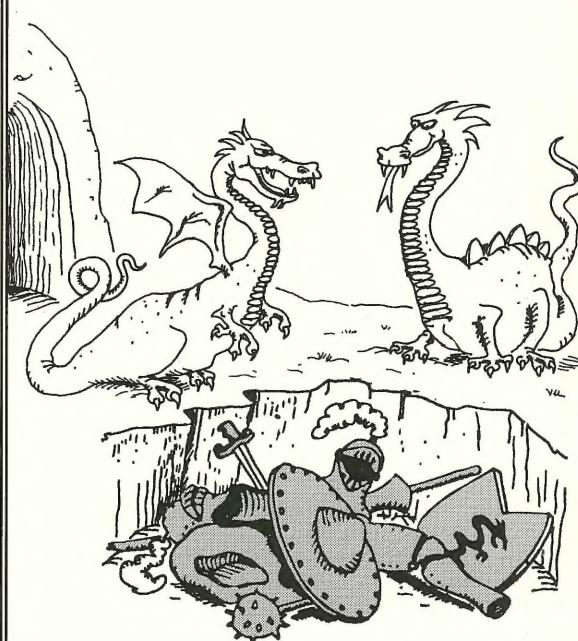
Larson



"Yes. ... They're quite strange during  
the larval stage."

1/2/80

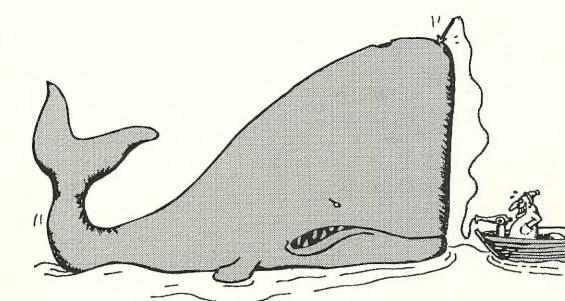
Larson



"Of course I never eat the shells."

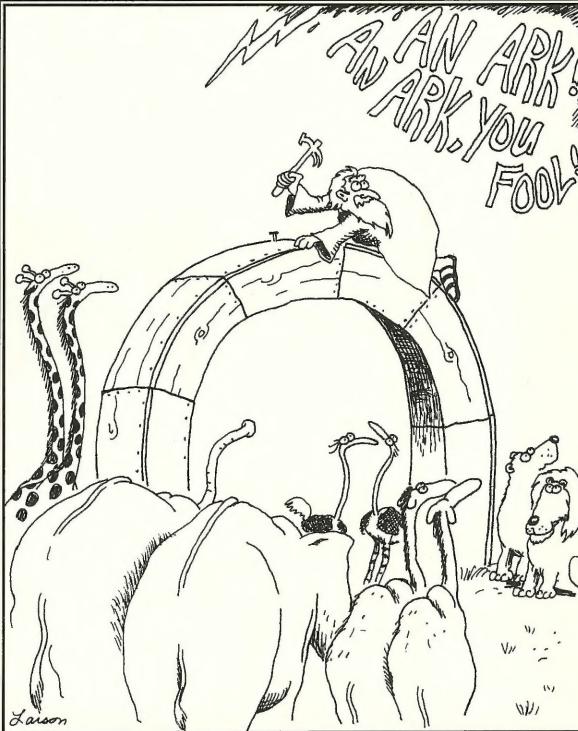
1/3/80

Larson



Larson

1/5/80



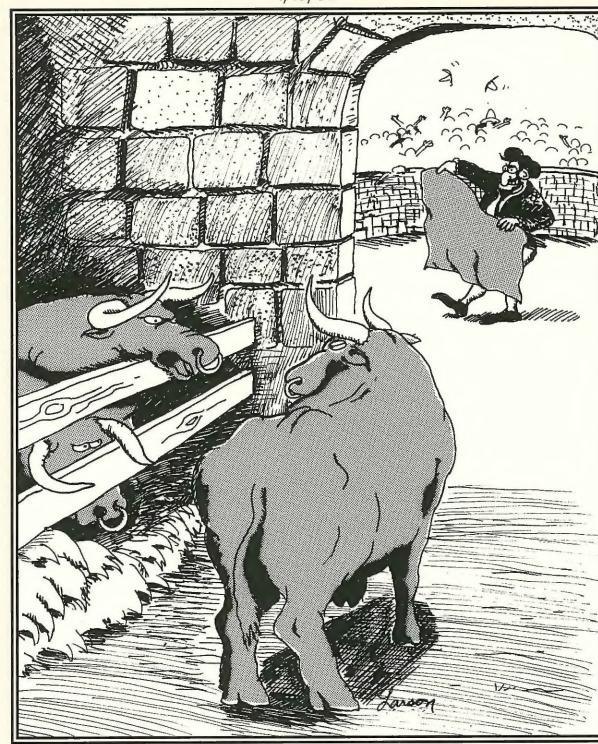
Larson

1/8/80



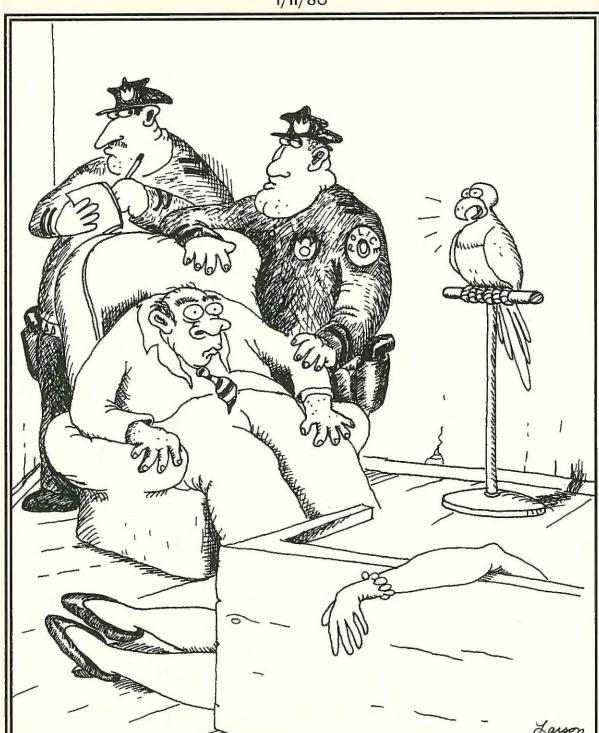
"Egad! We must find some means of discarding the hideous thing!"

1/10/80



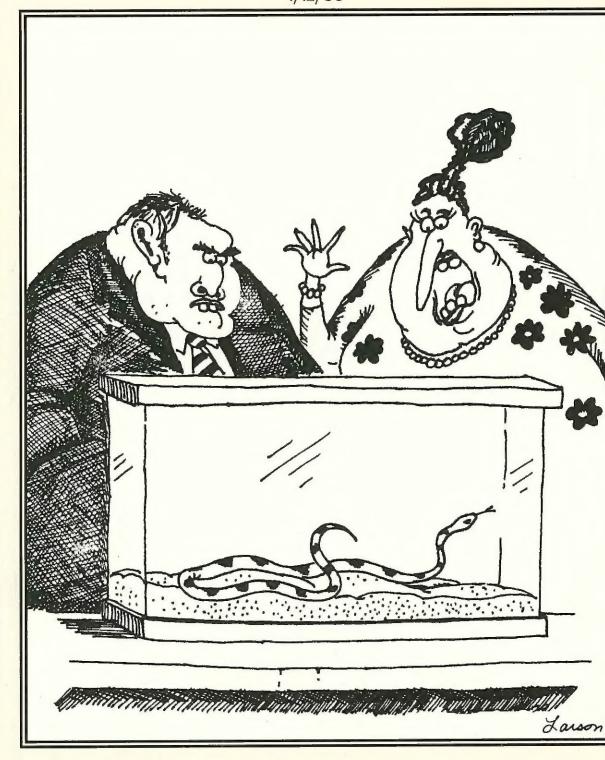
"Bring back his ear."

1/11/80



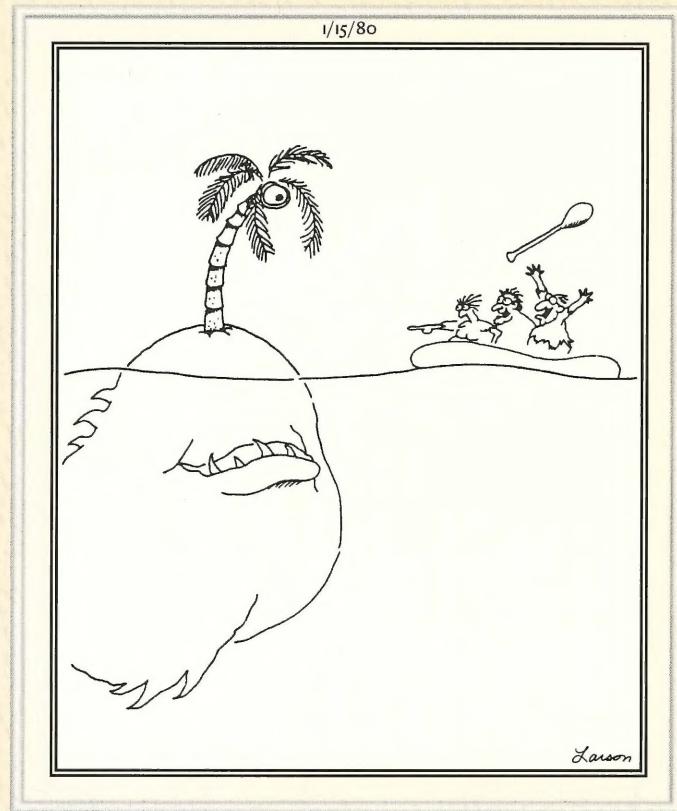
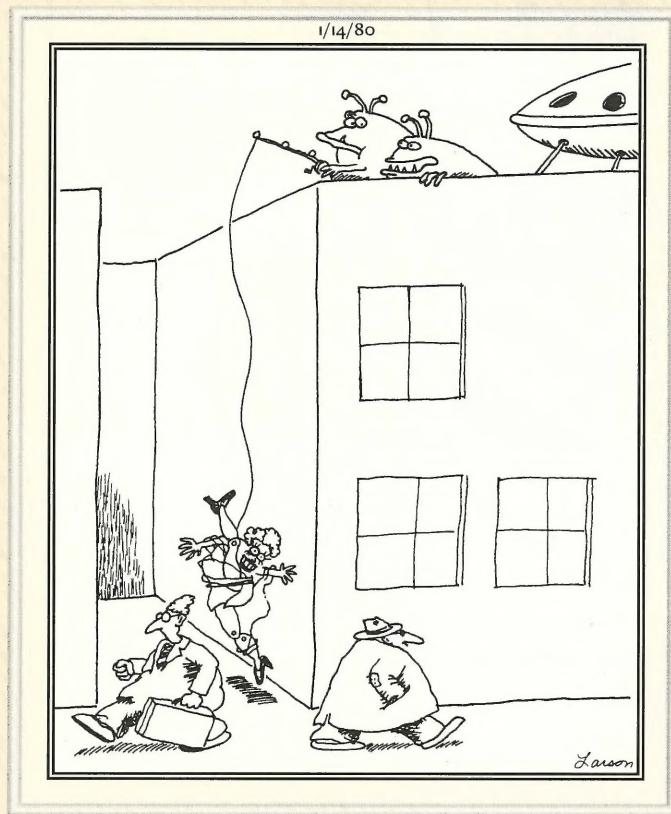
"Polly wanna cracker. ... Polly wanna cracker. ...  
Pretty bird. ... HARRY! DON'T SHOOT! ...  
Pretty bird."

1/12/80

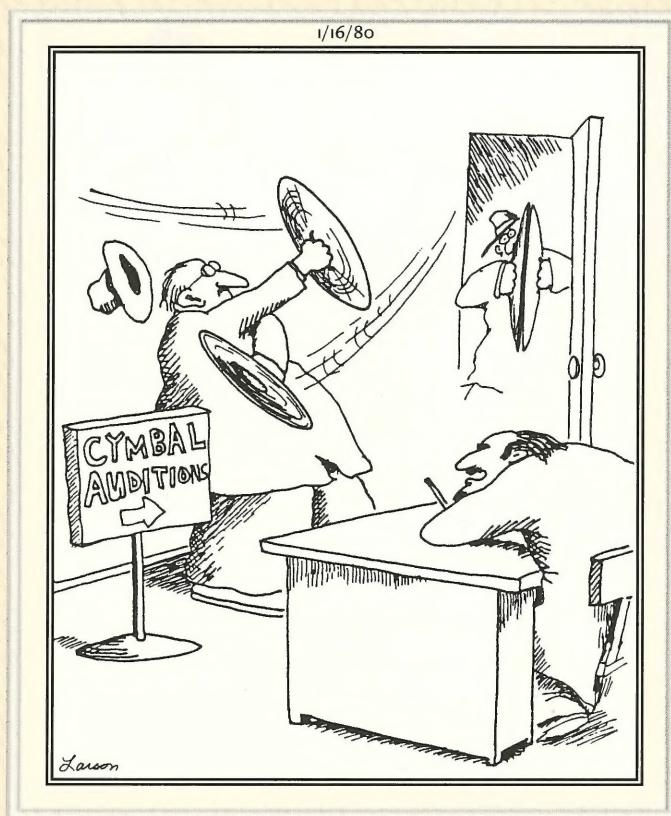


"Egad! ... What a hideous creature!"

January 1980

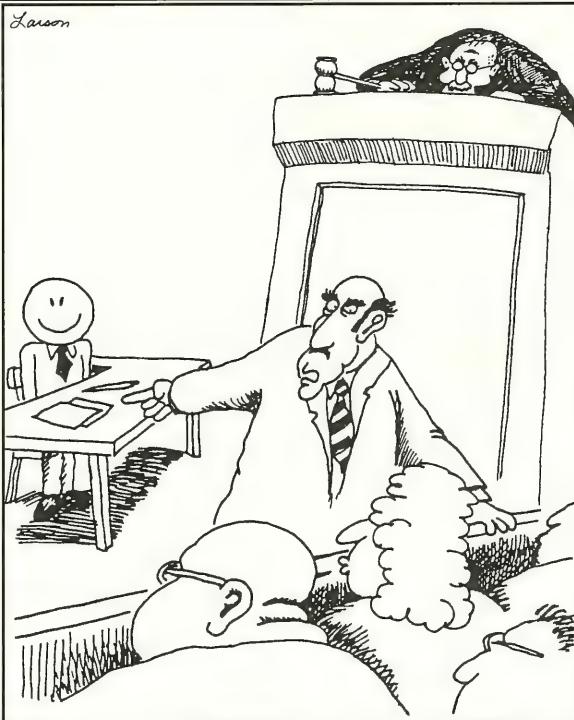


"Something's wrong. ... Reel up  
and check the bait."



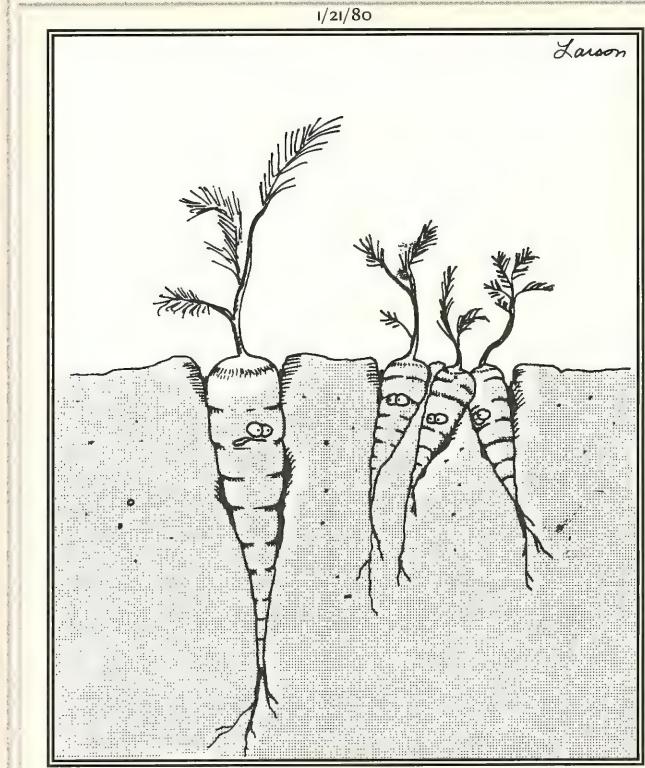
"Next!"

1/18/80



"And so I ask the jury—is that the face  
of a mass murderer?"

1/21/80

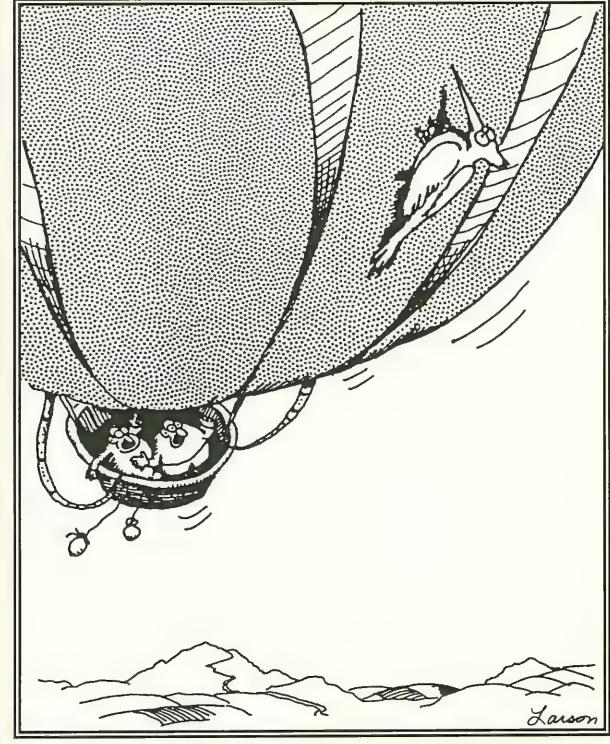


"... And then the creatures yanked him out of  
the ground, skinned him alive, boiled him,  
and ate him. The end. Now go to sleep!"

1/22/80

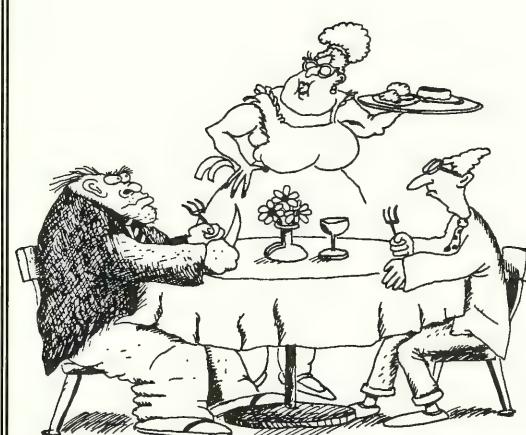


1/23/80



1/24/80

Larson

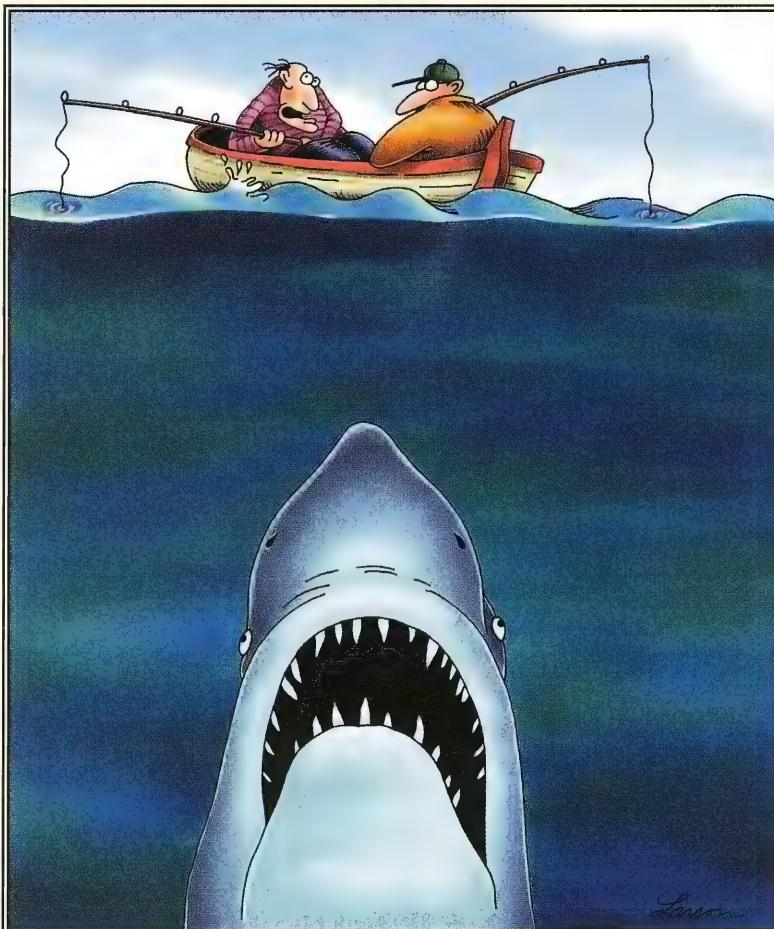


1/28/80



"All right, let's see ... which one's the 'Viva la Vegetarian' and which one's the 'Prime Rib Papa'?"

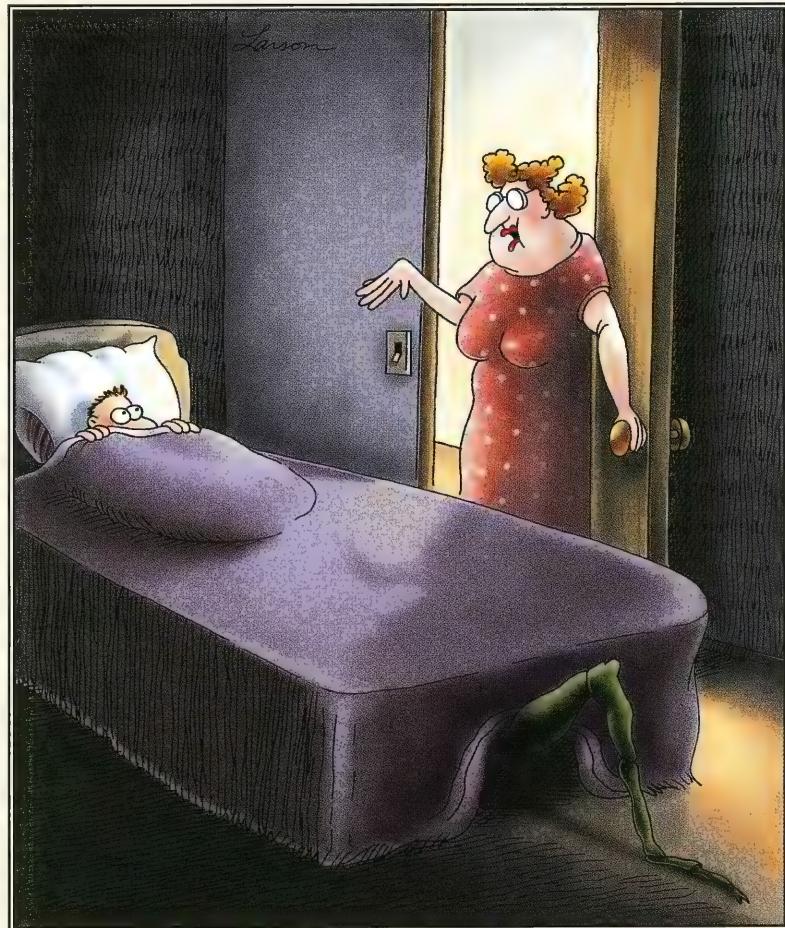
1/25/80



"There it goes again ... that eerie music."

January 1980

1/30/80



"Nighty-night, dear, sleep tight ... and don't let  
the bedbugs bite."

1/29/80



"And don't you flare your nostrils at me, either!"

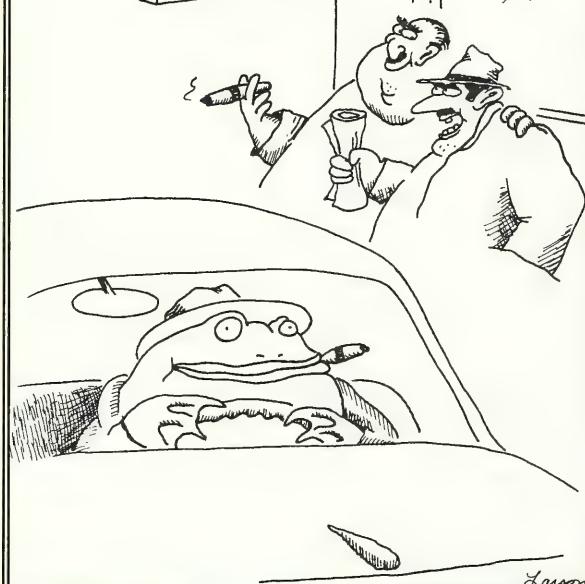
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February 1980

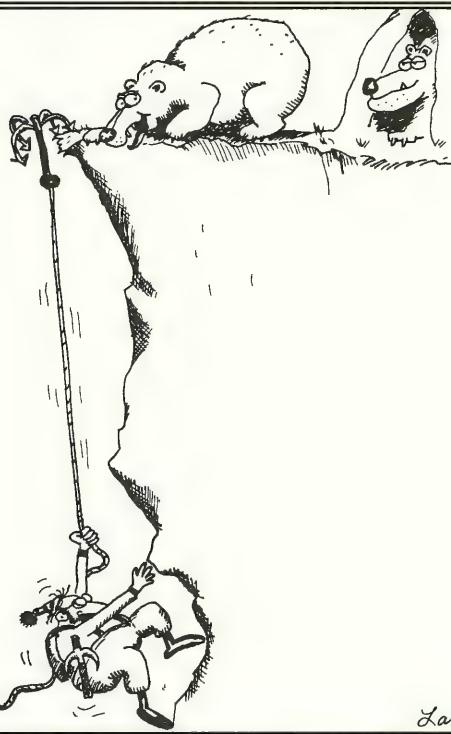
2/5/80

FRANK'S  
REALTY



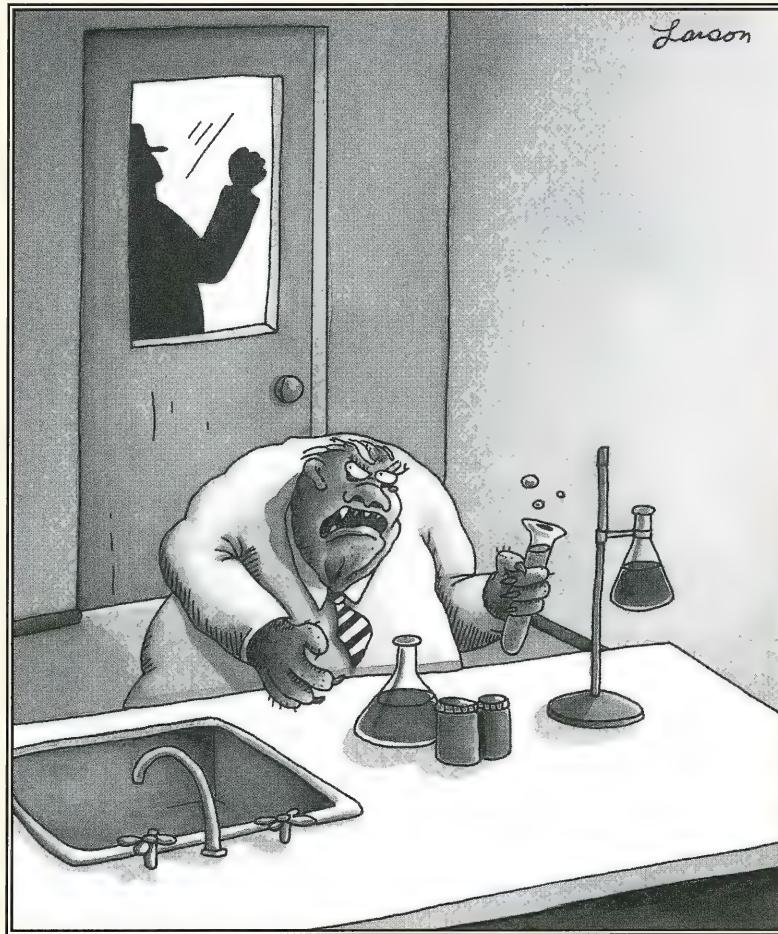
"Well, another sucker just bought twenty acres of swampland."

2/1/80



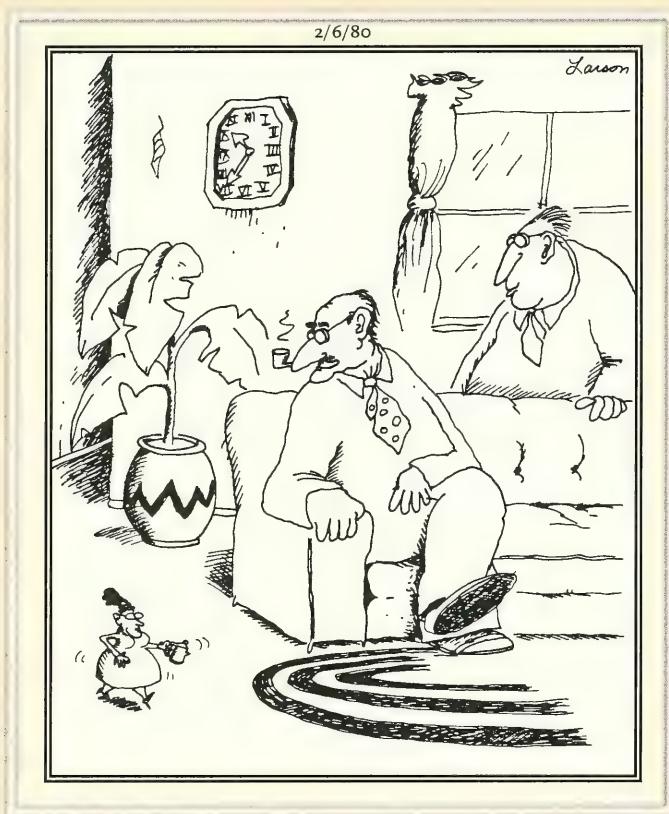
"We'll be eating in tonight."

2/4/80

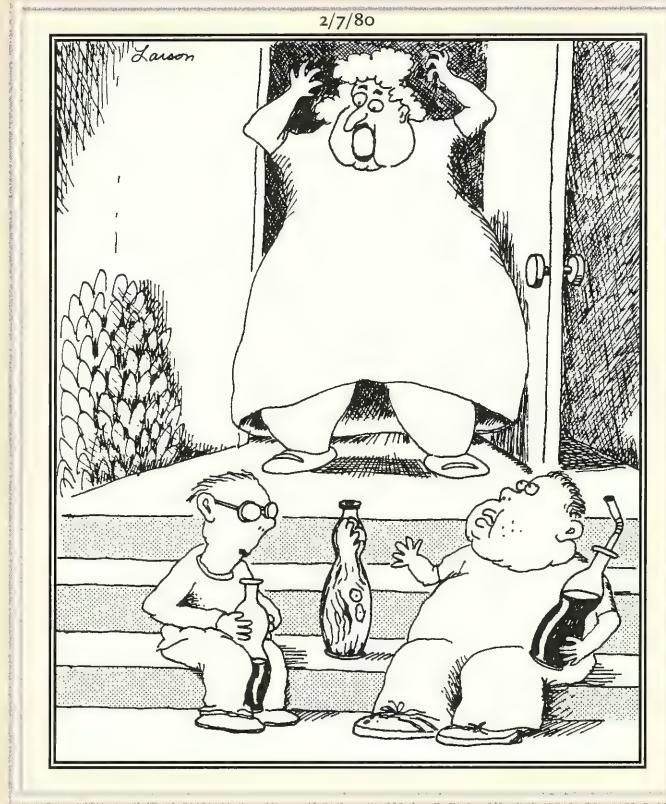


"Hang on! I'm changing!"

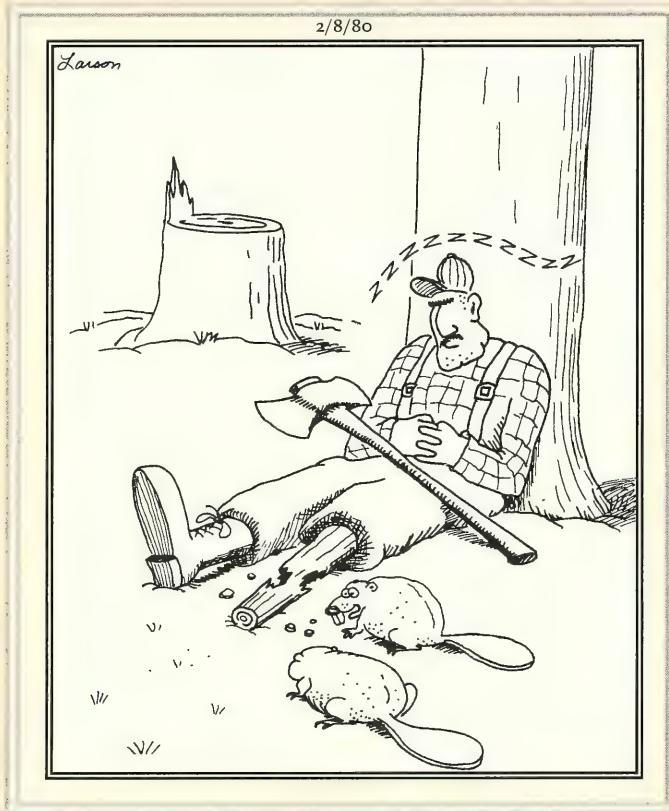
February 1980



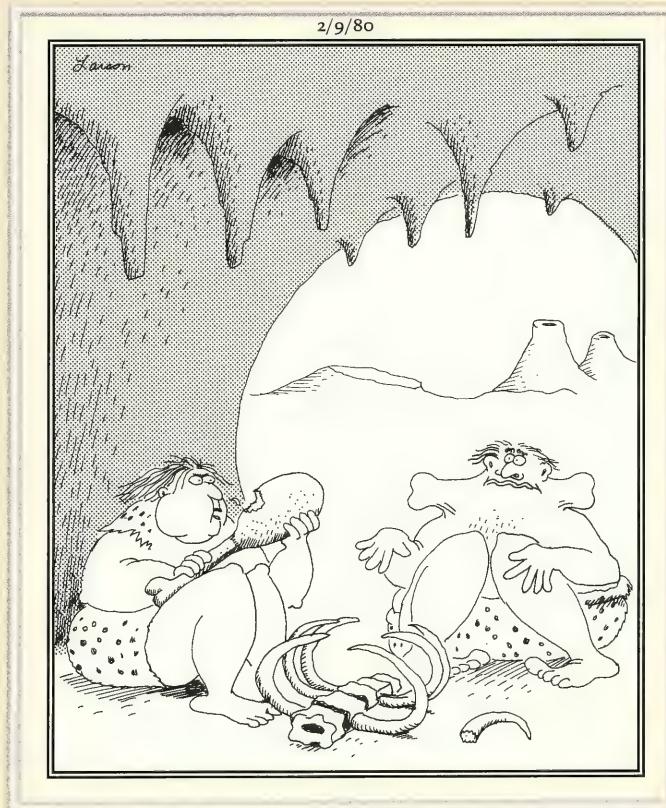
"... and this must be the little woman."



"Gee, Mom! Andy was just showing us how far he could suck his lip into the bottle!"



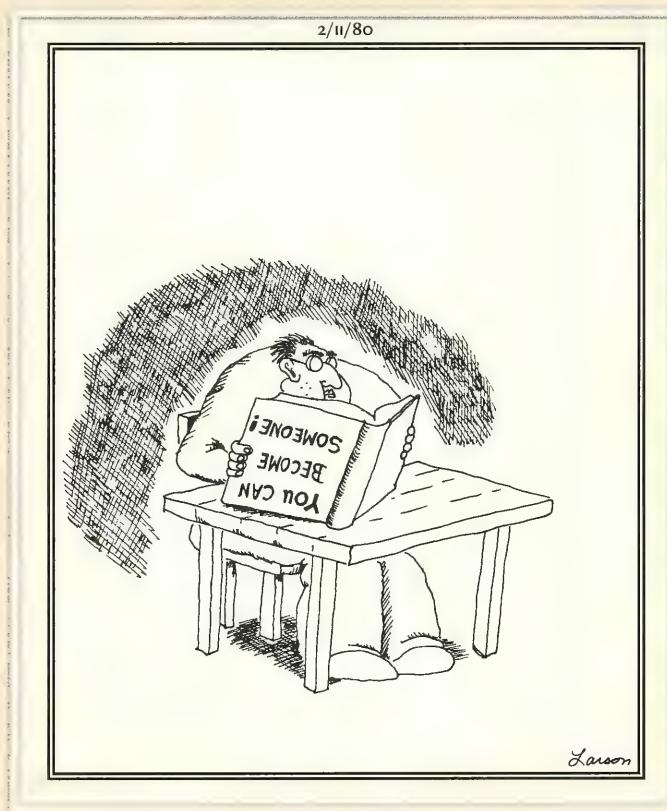
"Hey! They're edible! ... This changes everything!"



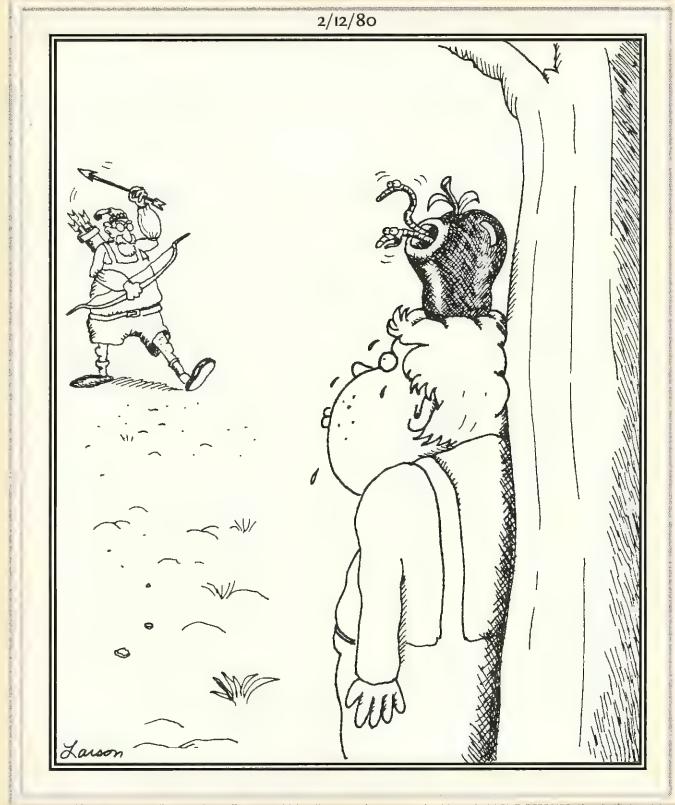
"I told you to watch for bones."

February 1980

2/11/80

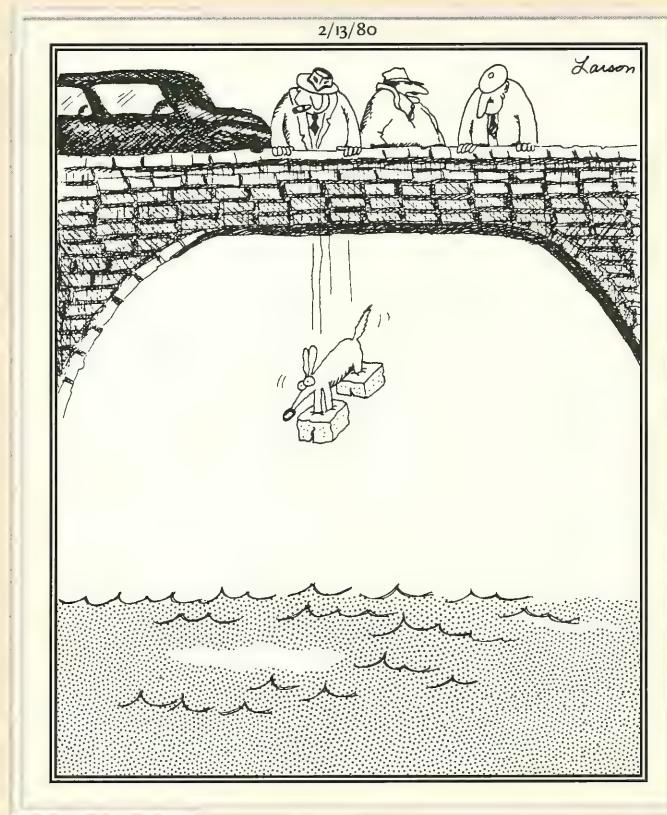


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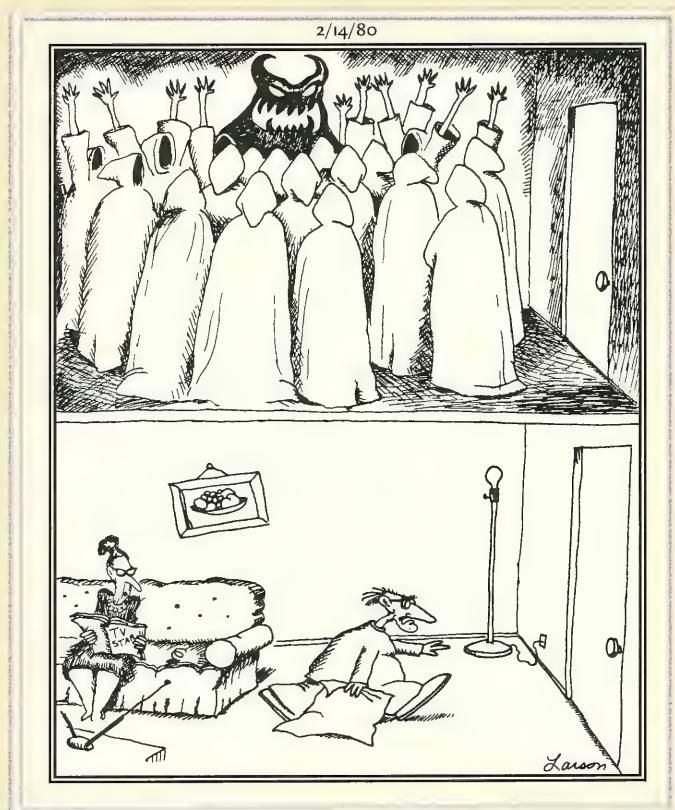


"But what if he hits the apple?"

2/13/80



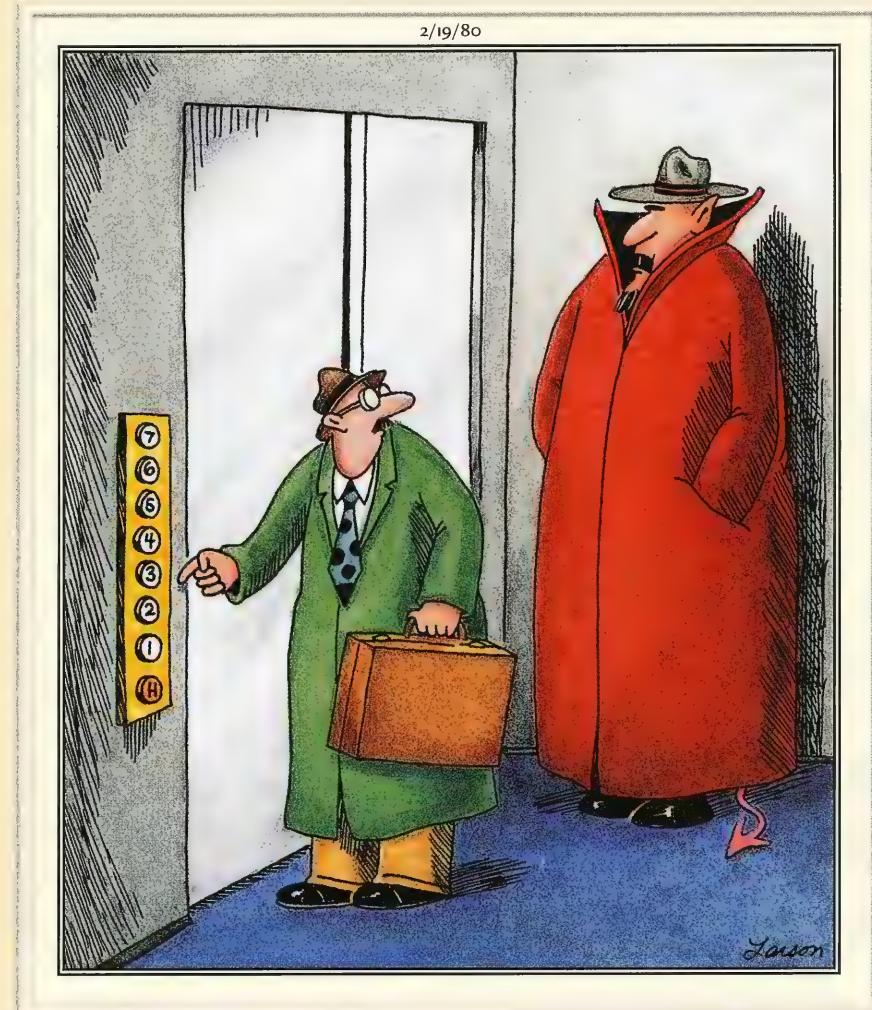
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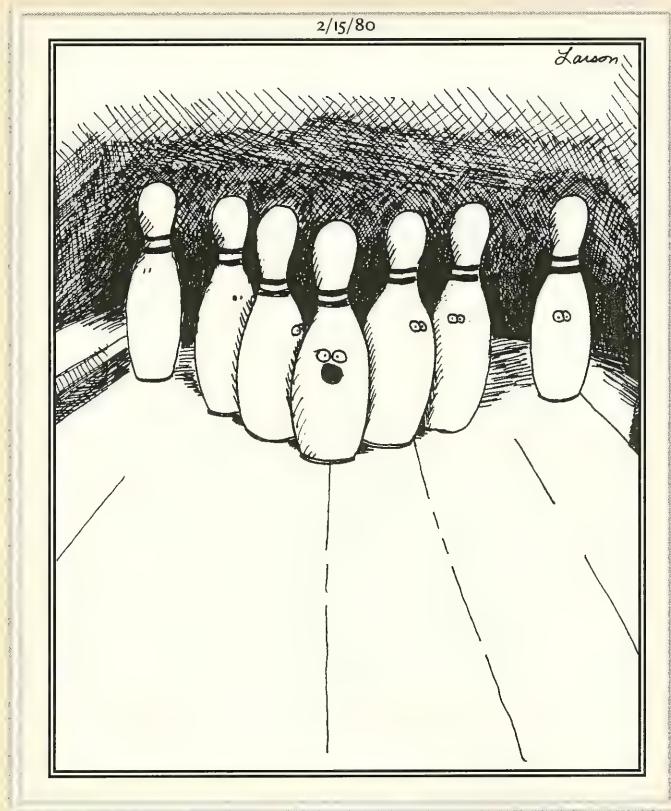
"That does it! ... I'm going to go up there and give those people hell!"

"He bit the Godfather."

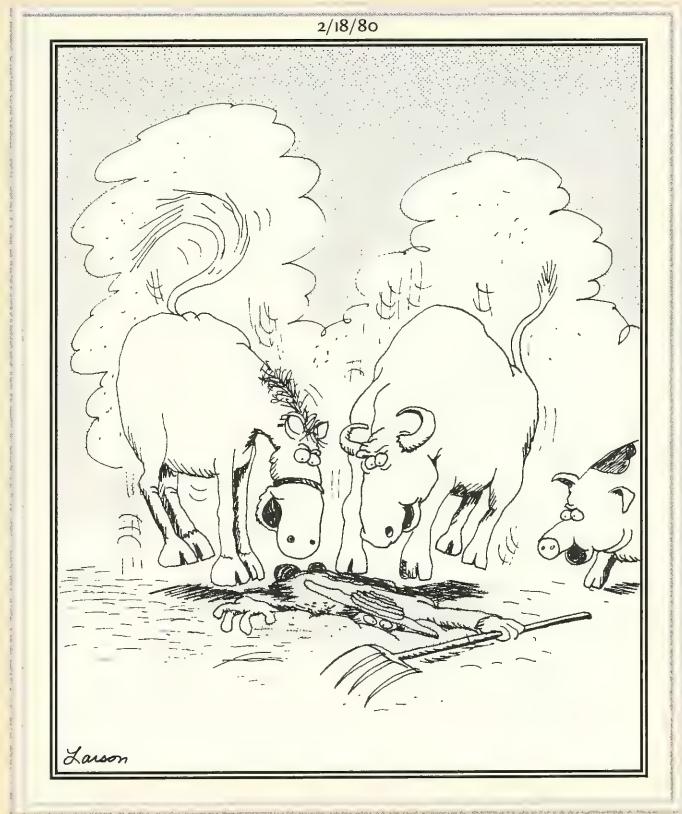
February 1980



"H,' please ... for both of us."



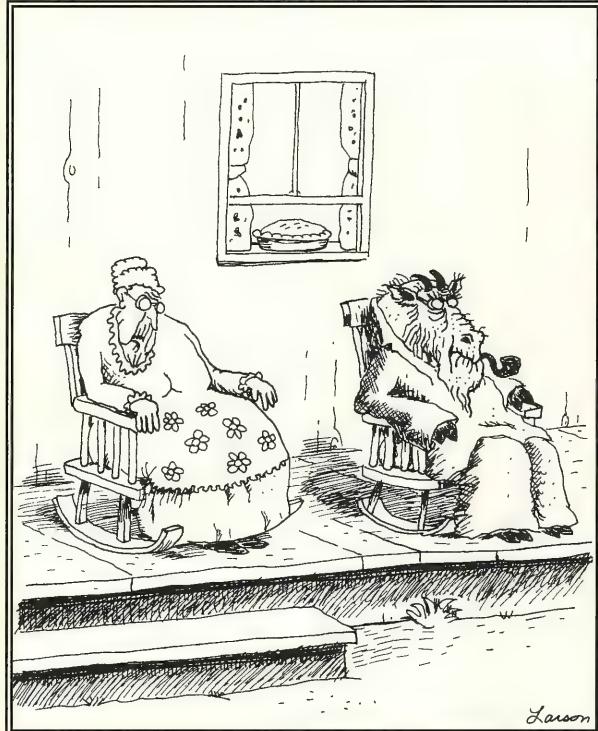
"My God! ... Here it comes again!"



"Old McDonald had a farm, eeyi-eeyi-yo ..."

February 1980

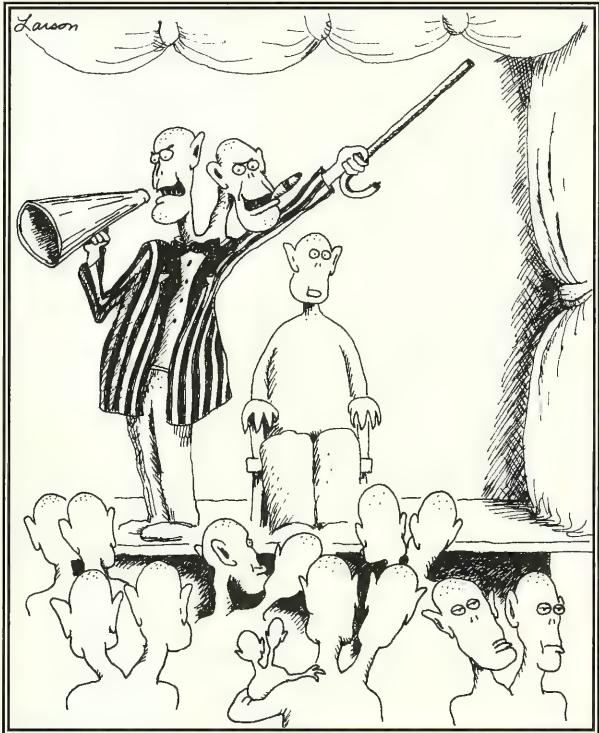
2/20/80



Larson

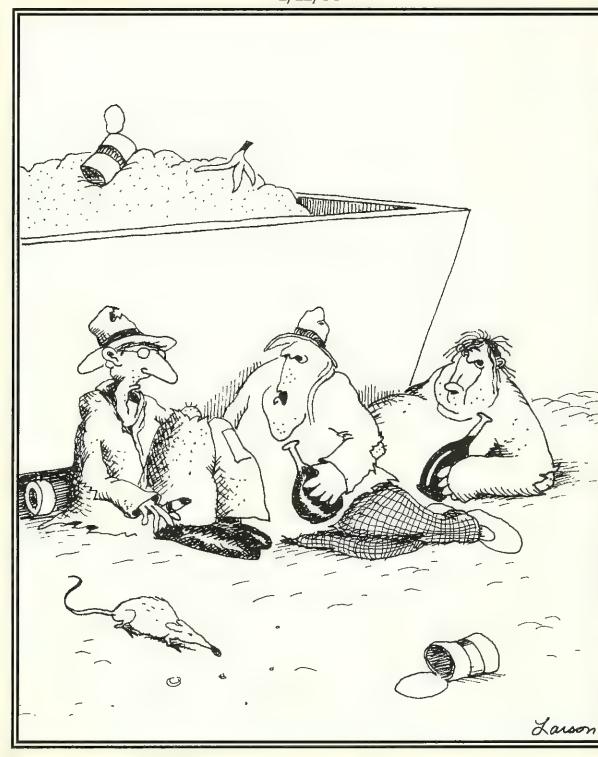
"Mother was right—you're nothing but an old goat."

2/21/80



"Incredible you say? But true, ladies and gentlemen! ... He has only one head!"

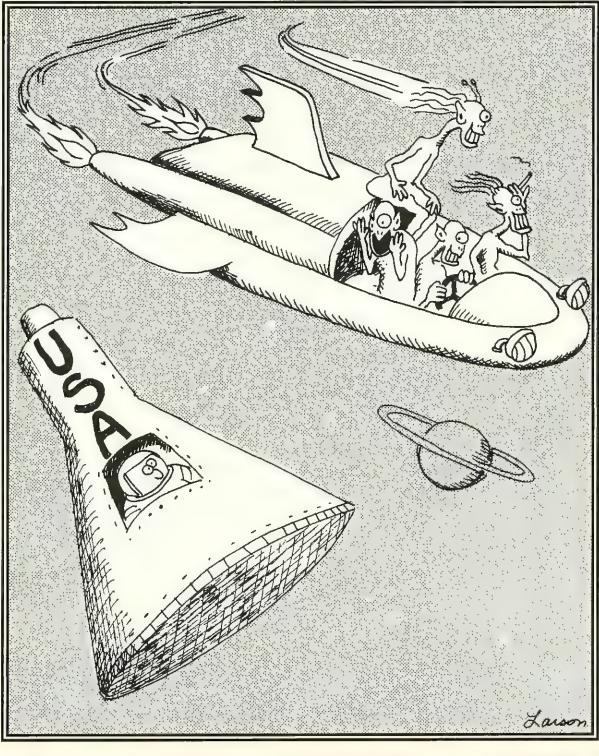
2/22/80



Larson

"Excuse me, but must you smoke that foul thing around here?"

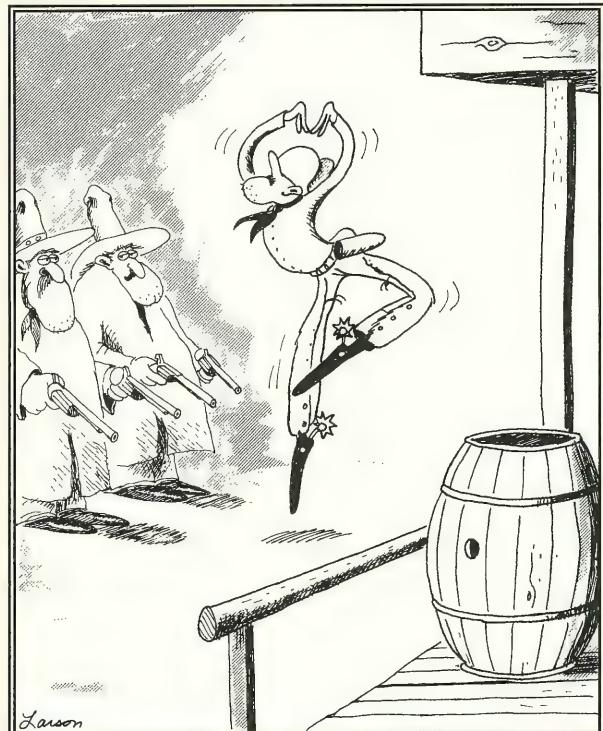
2/25/80



Larson

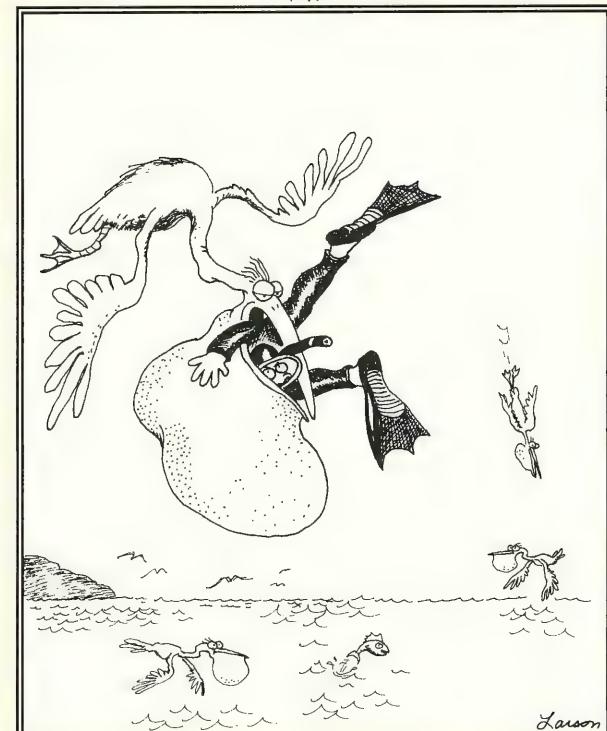
"GET A ZORB!"

2/26/80

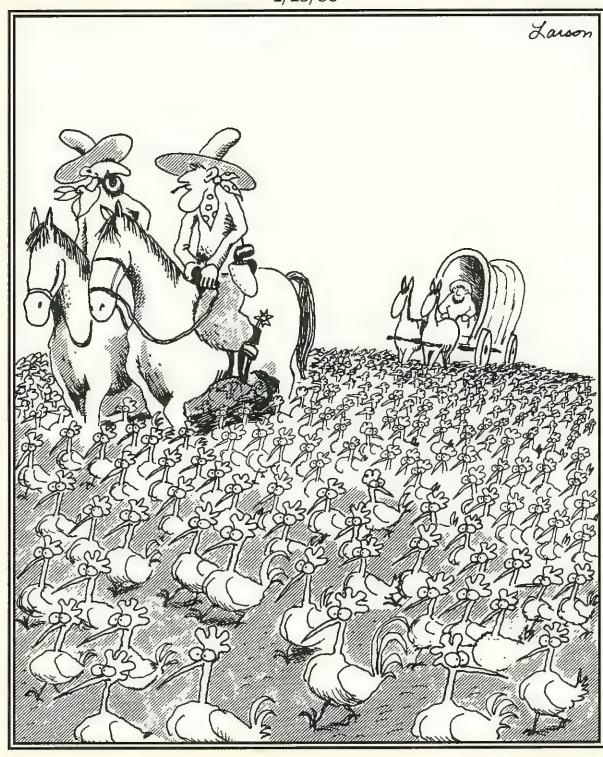


"He's makin' a fool of us, Bart."

2/27/80

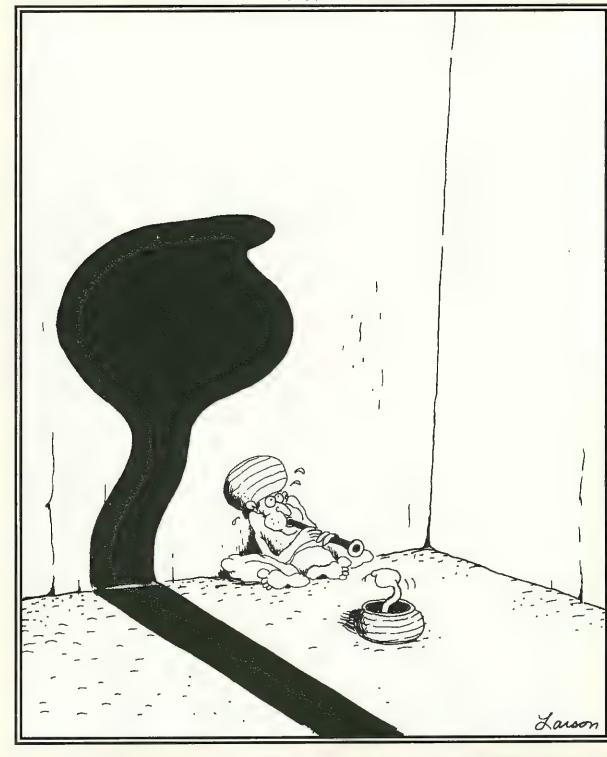


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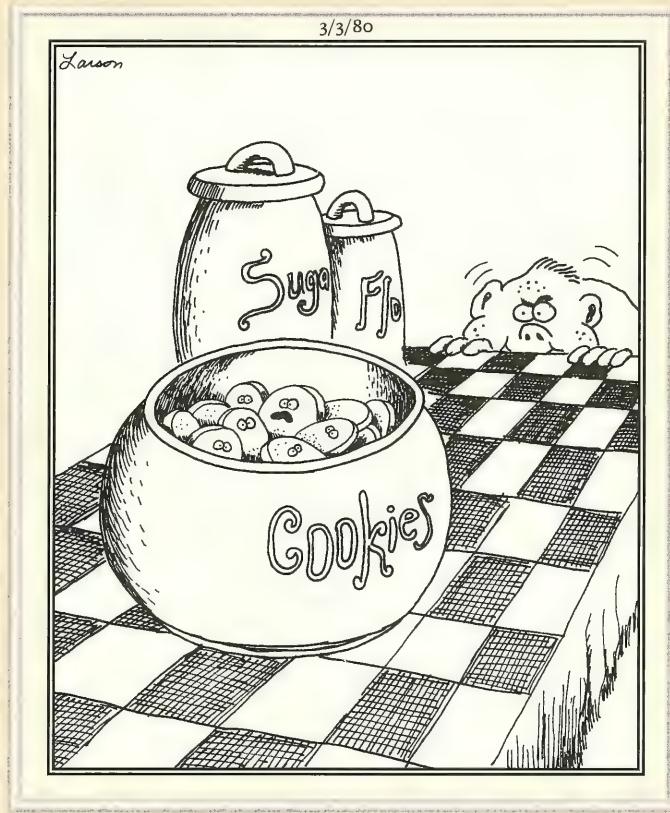


"And I tell ya ... the next trail drive I sign onto, I'm readin' the fine print!"

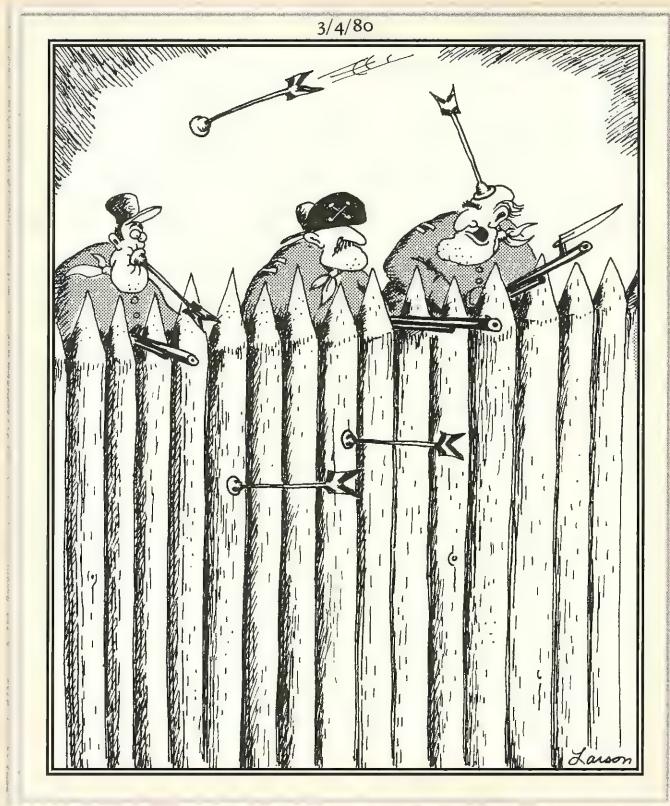
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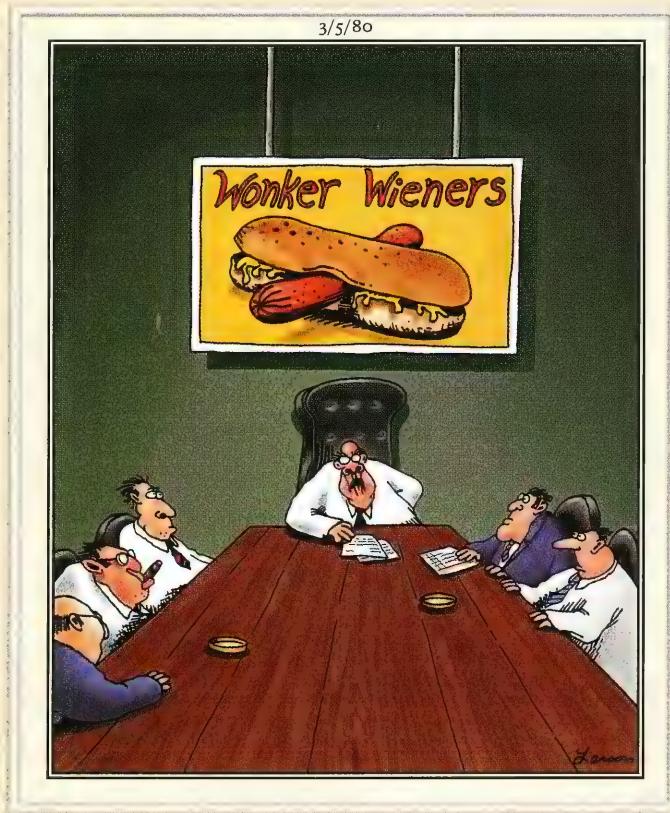
March 1980



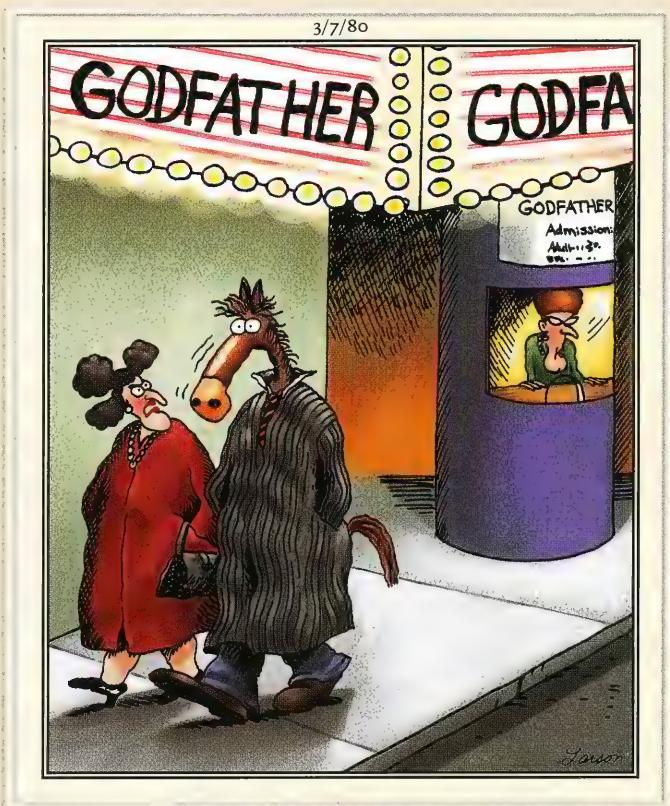
"It's back!"



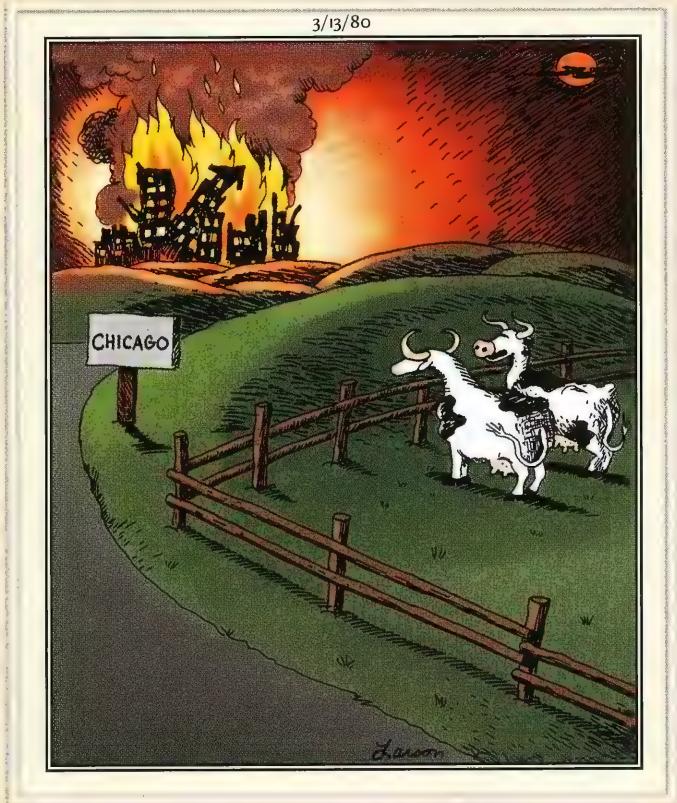
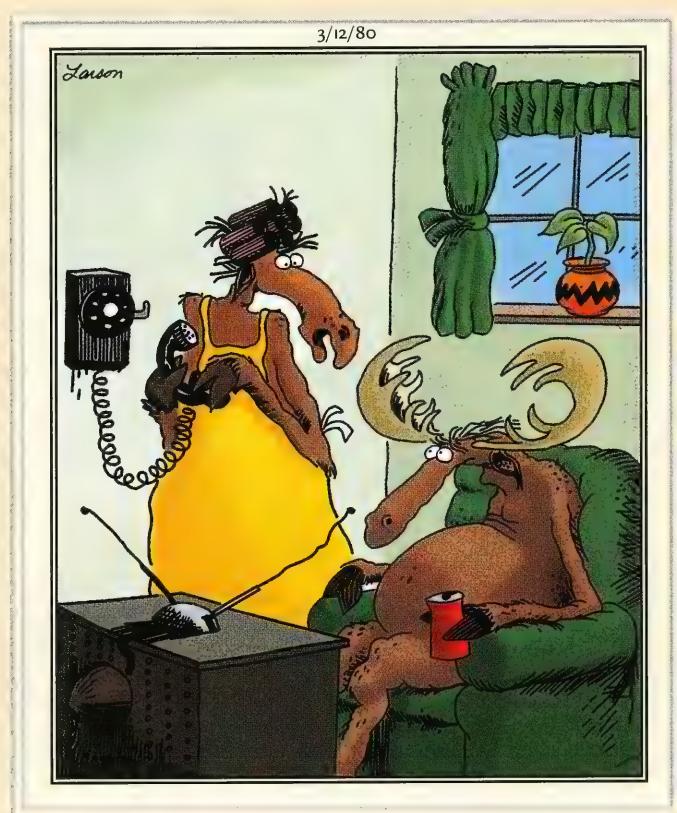
"Gad! ... Not *these* Indians again!"



"And so I've reached the conclusion, gentlemen, that the Wonker Wiener Company is riddled with incompetence."

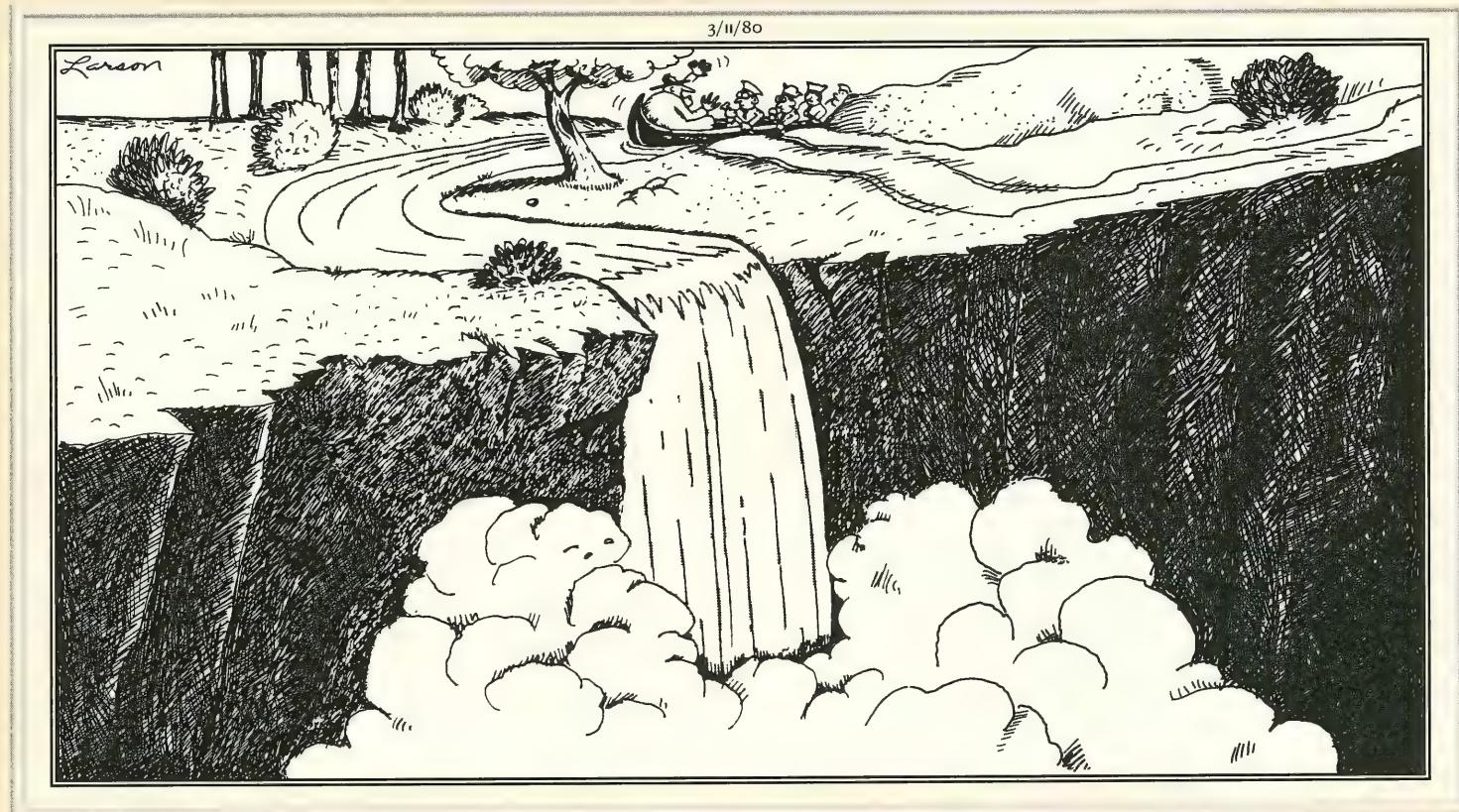


"Get a hold of yourself! ... It was only a movie, for crying out loud!"



"It seems that agent 6373 has accomplished her mission."

"It's the call of the wild."



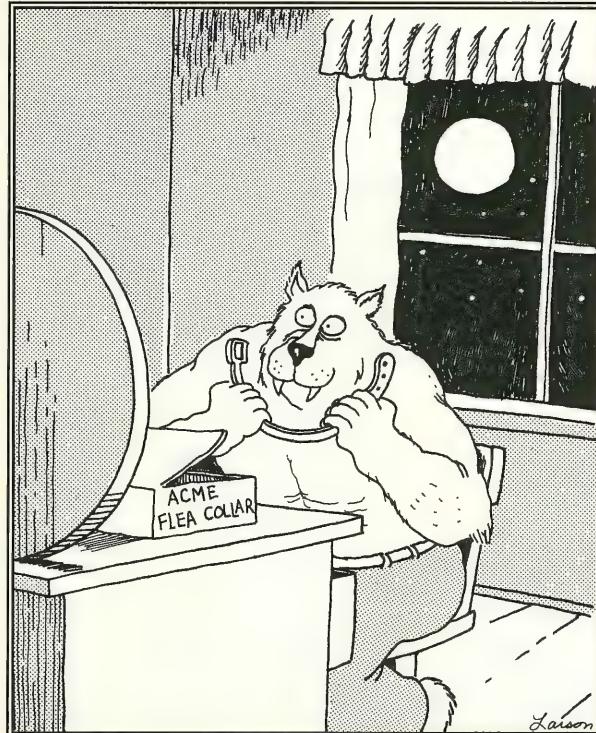
"... and then the second group comes in—'row, row, row your boat'..."

March 1980

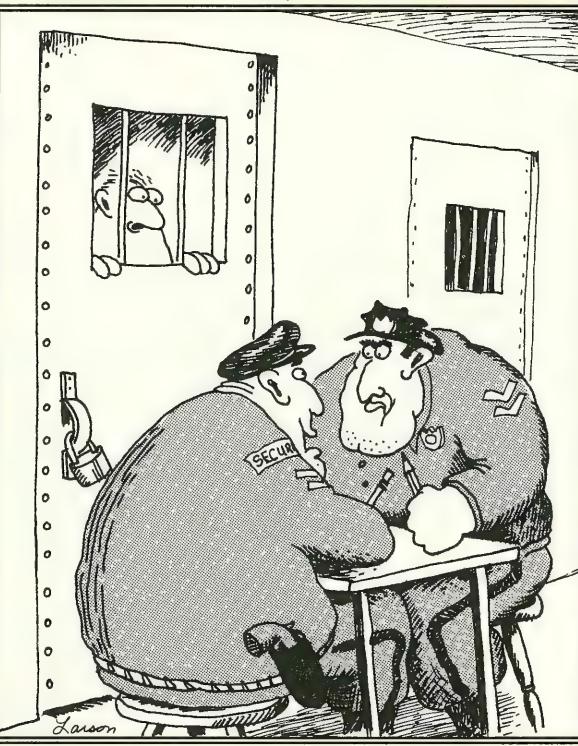
3/6/80



3/10/80

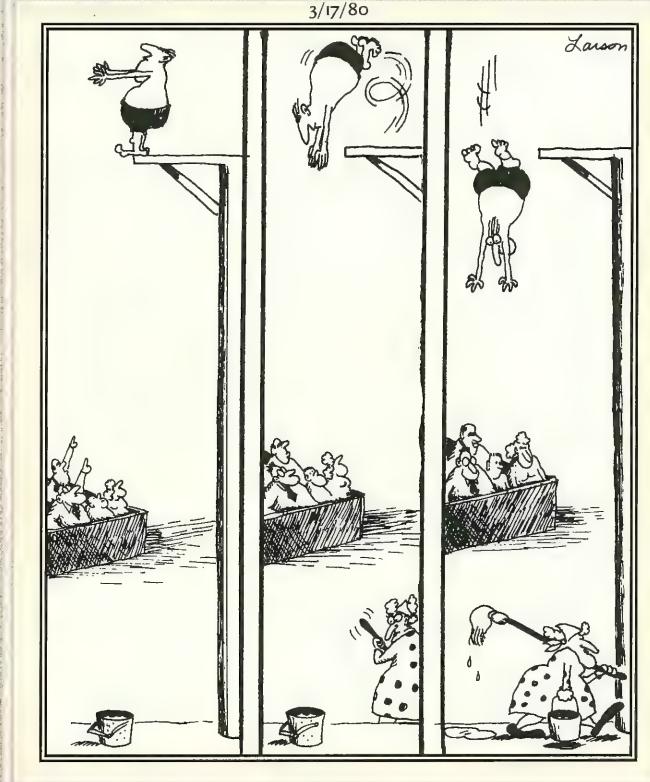


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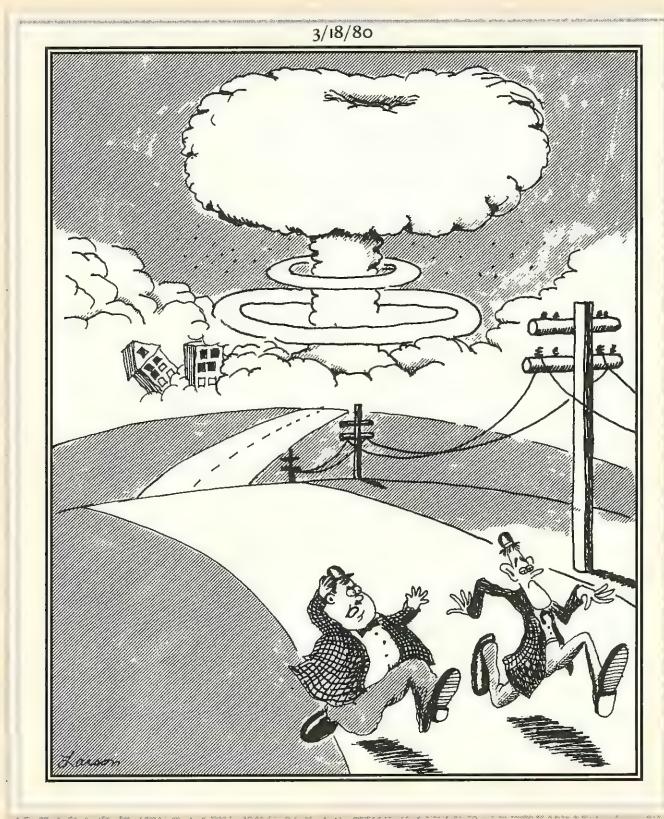


"HANGMAN! ... You lose!"

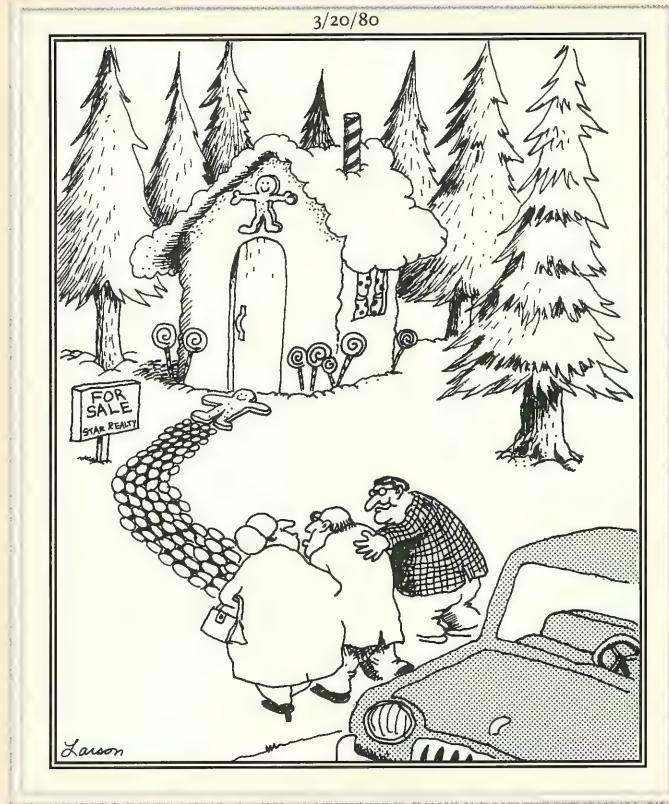
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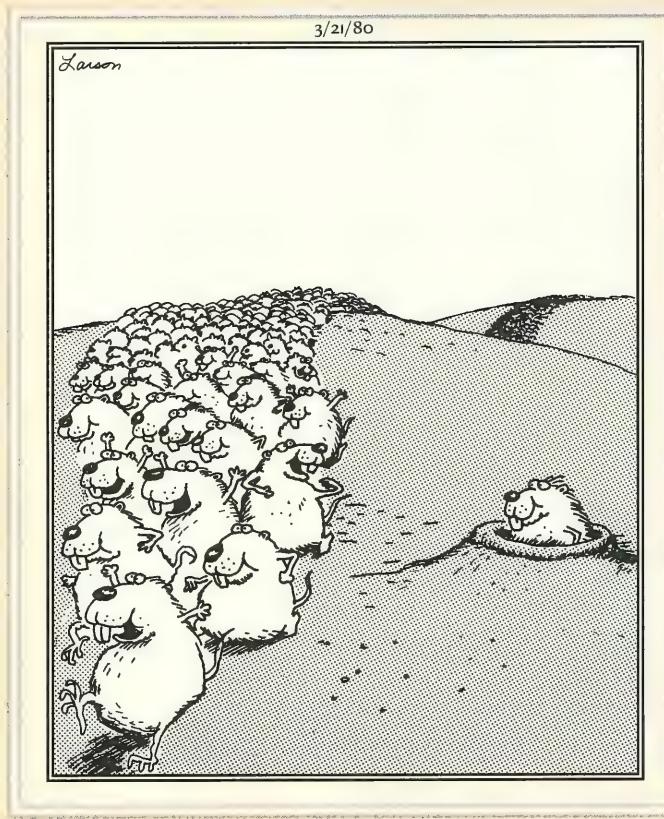
March 1980



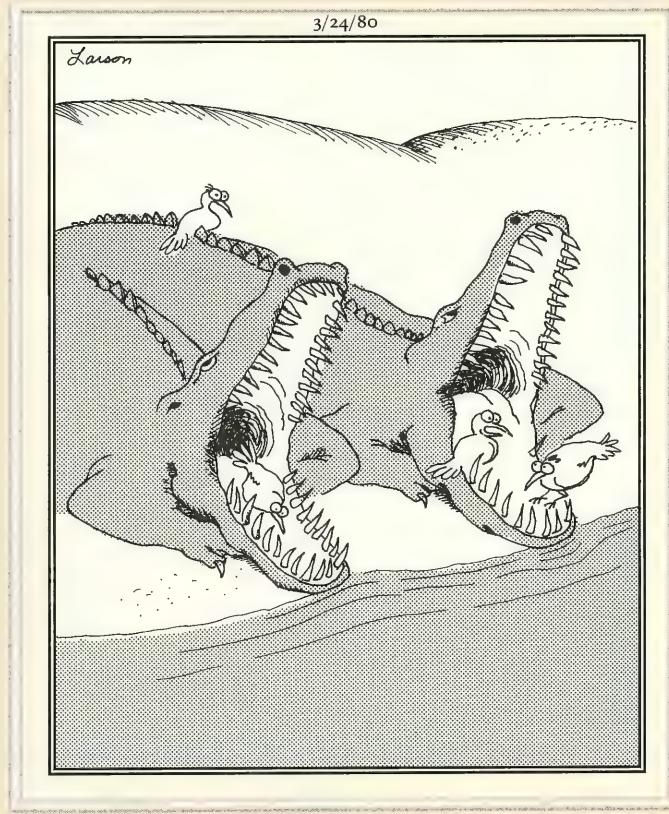
"Now you've done it!"



"We just listed it. ... Some young punks vandalized the place and cooked the owner."



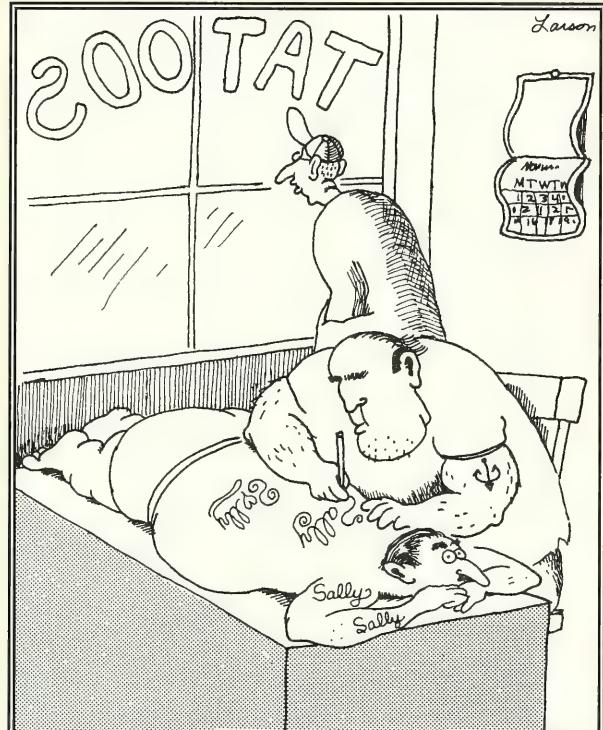
"C'mon! You'll miss the fun! ... All the lemmings are going down to the beach!"



"Food's okay ... I just can't get used to the atmosphere."

March 1980

3/25/80

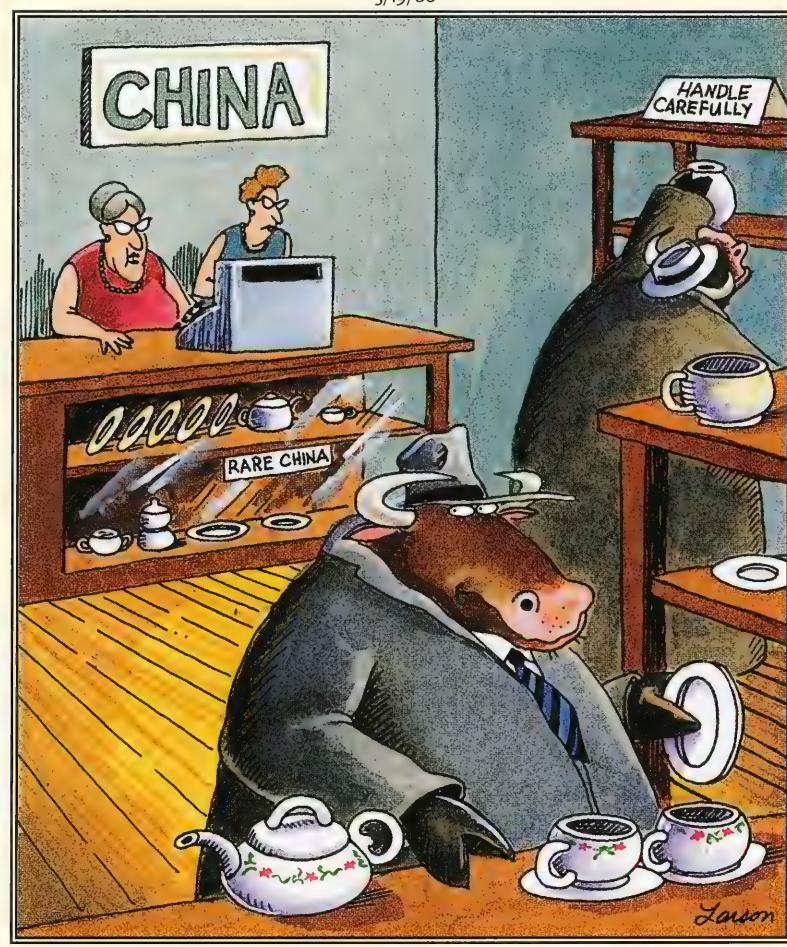


"Say, Ernie ... that looks like Sally across the street. ... And she's with some guy."

3/26/80



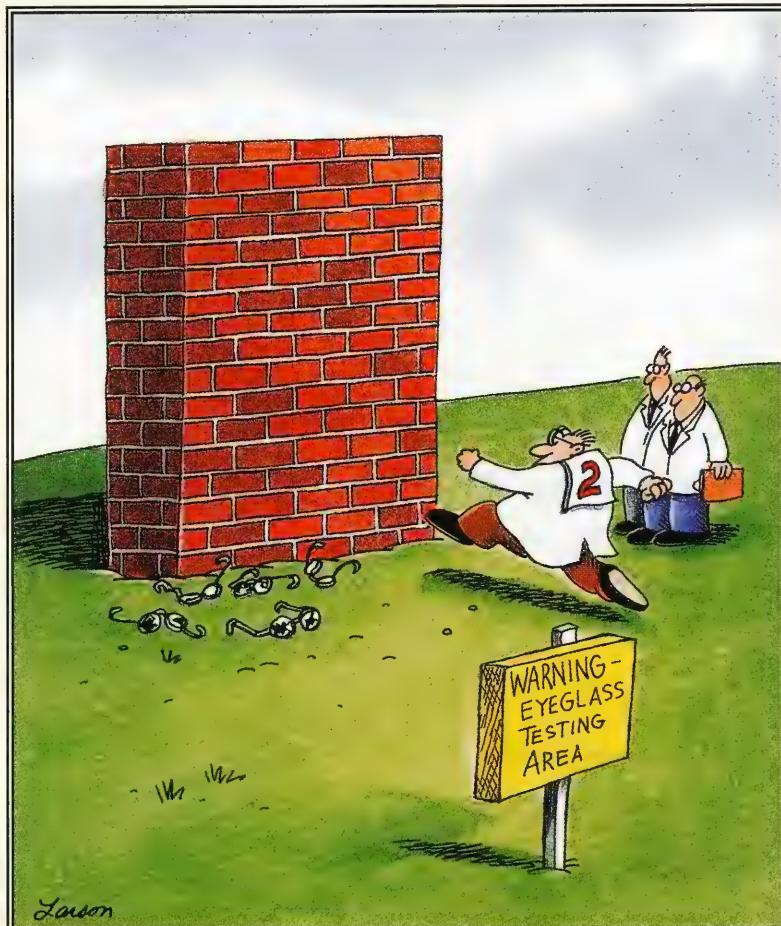
3/19/80



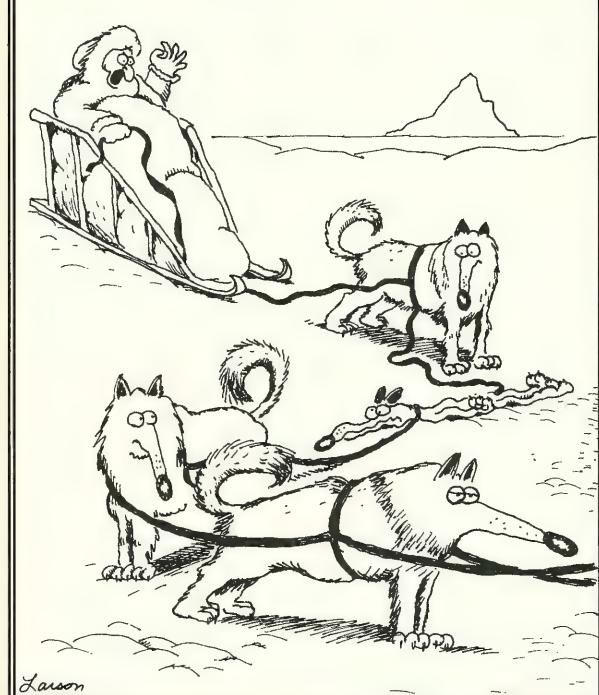
"I got a bad feeling about this, Harriet."

March 1980

3/28/80

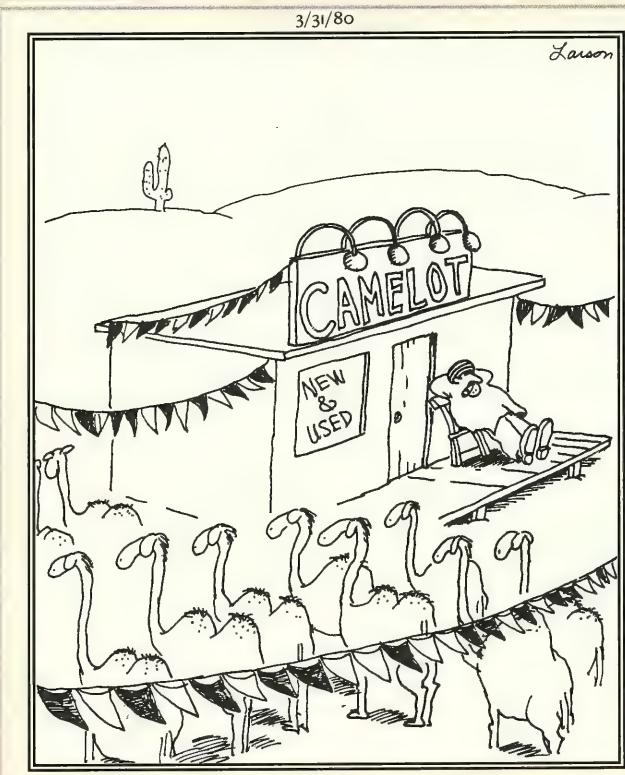


3/27/80

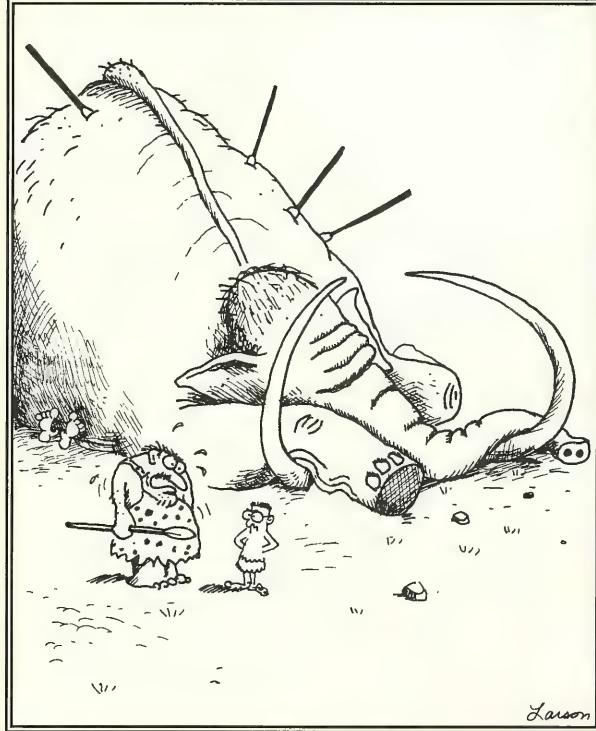


"Egad! ... Another flat!"

3/31/80

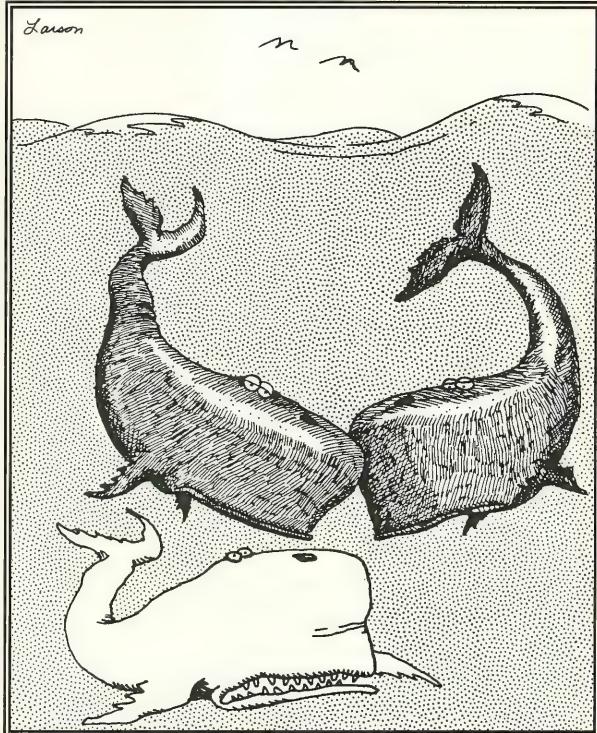


4/1/80



"I don't care if you don't like it! ... By God,  
you're gonna eat it!"

4/2/80



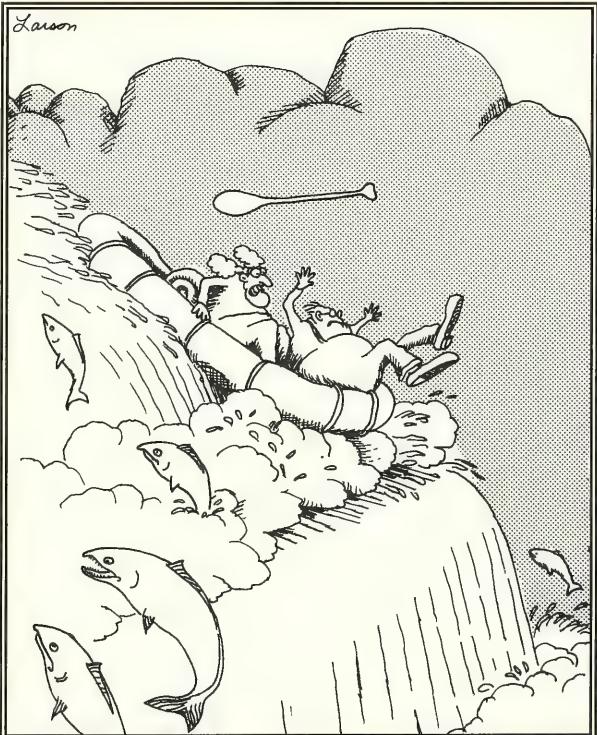
"I tell you he's up there! ... Those wild, sunken  
eyes! That horrid wooden leg! ... And he's  
looking for me!"

4/3/80



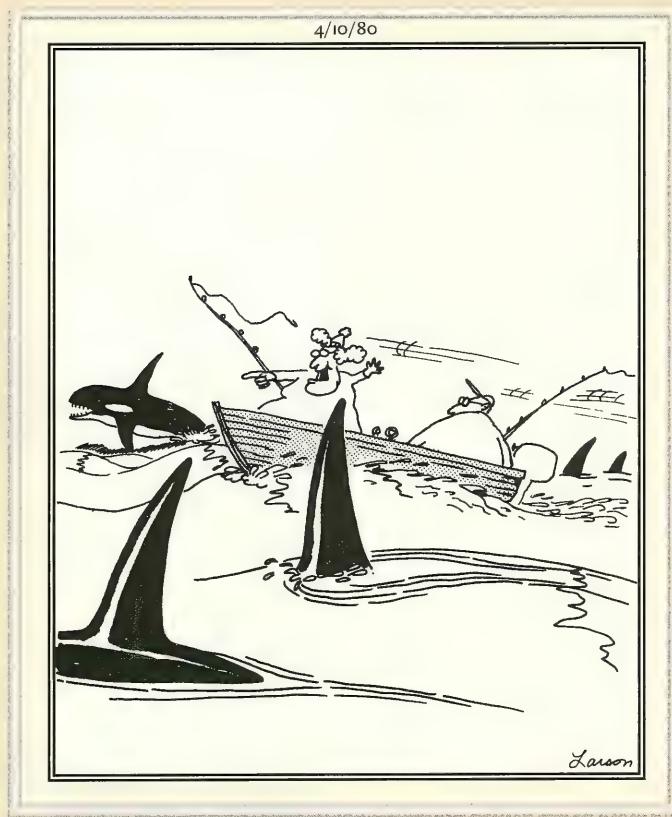
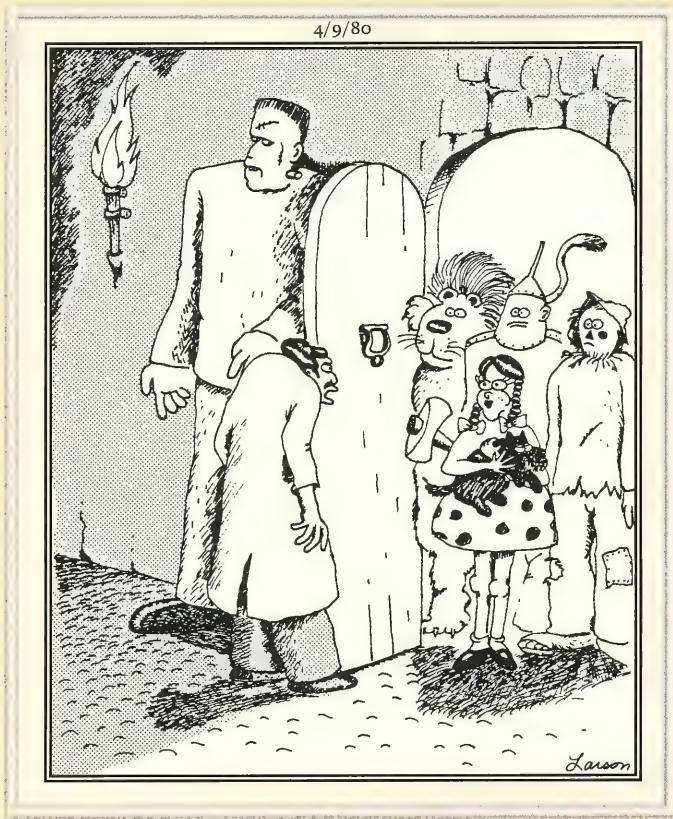
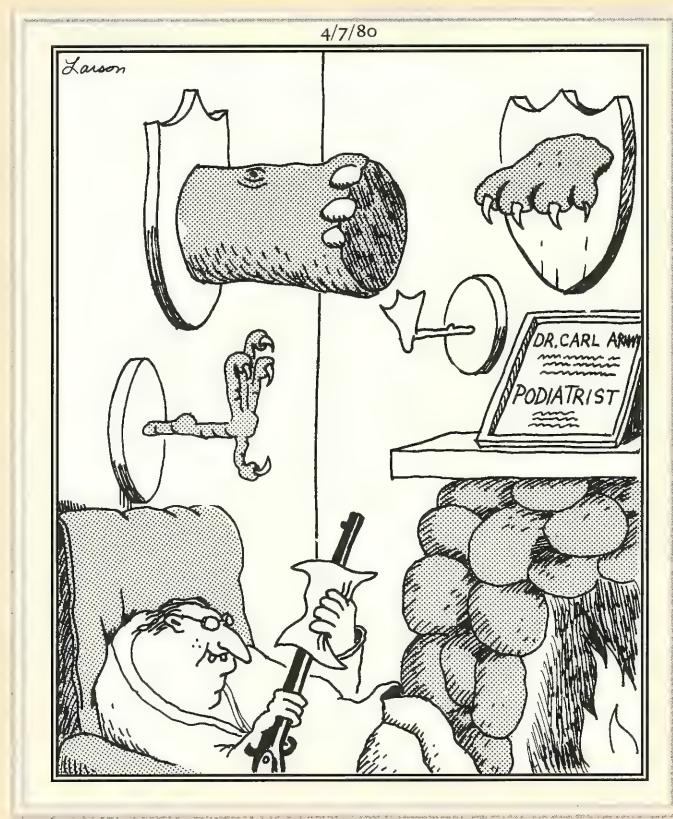
"Lousy food ... crummy service ... dinky cabins ...  
and that's only the tip of the iceberg!"

4/4/80



"I doubt if they'll ever reach the  
spawning grounds."

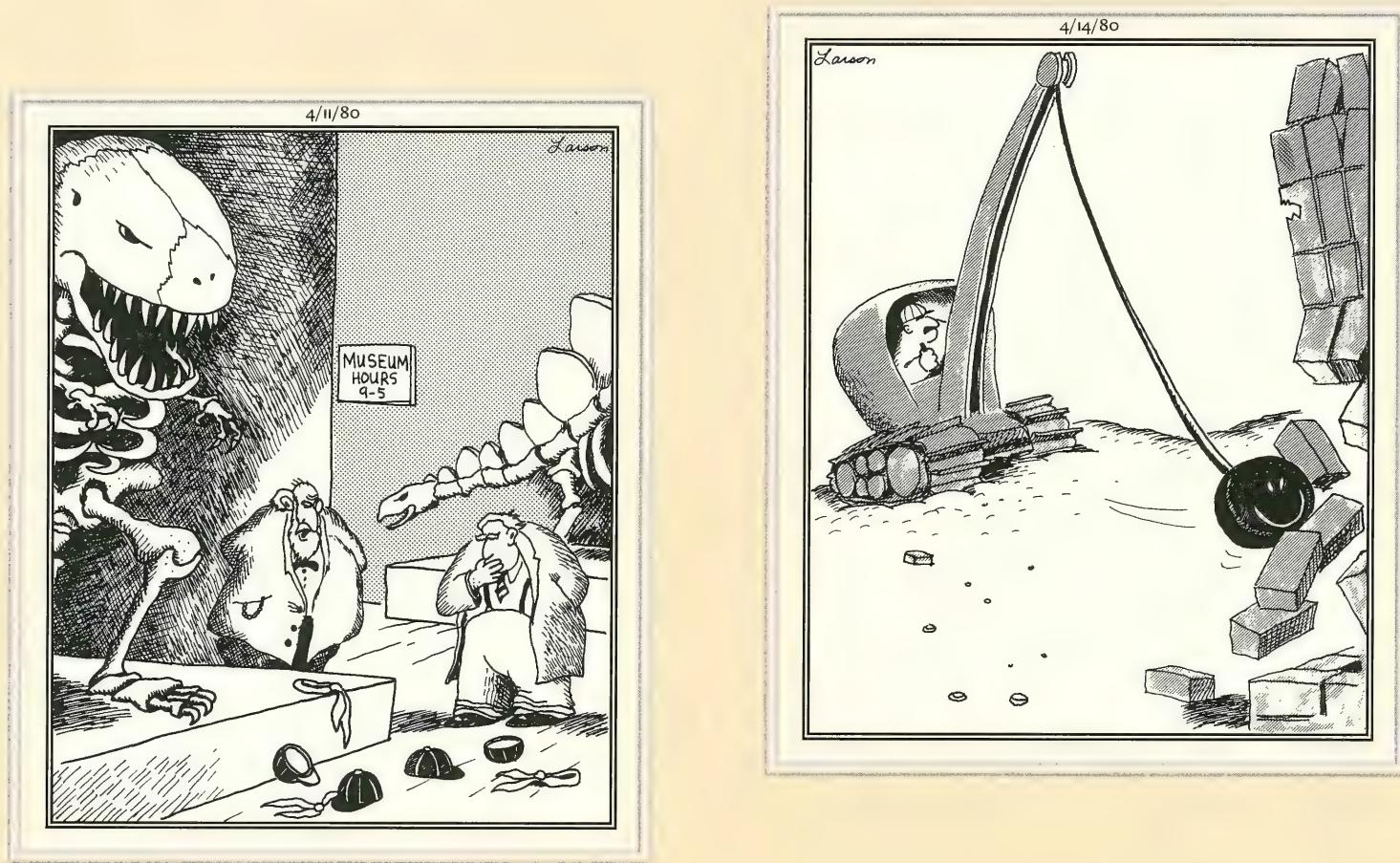
April 1980



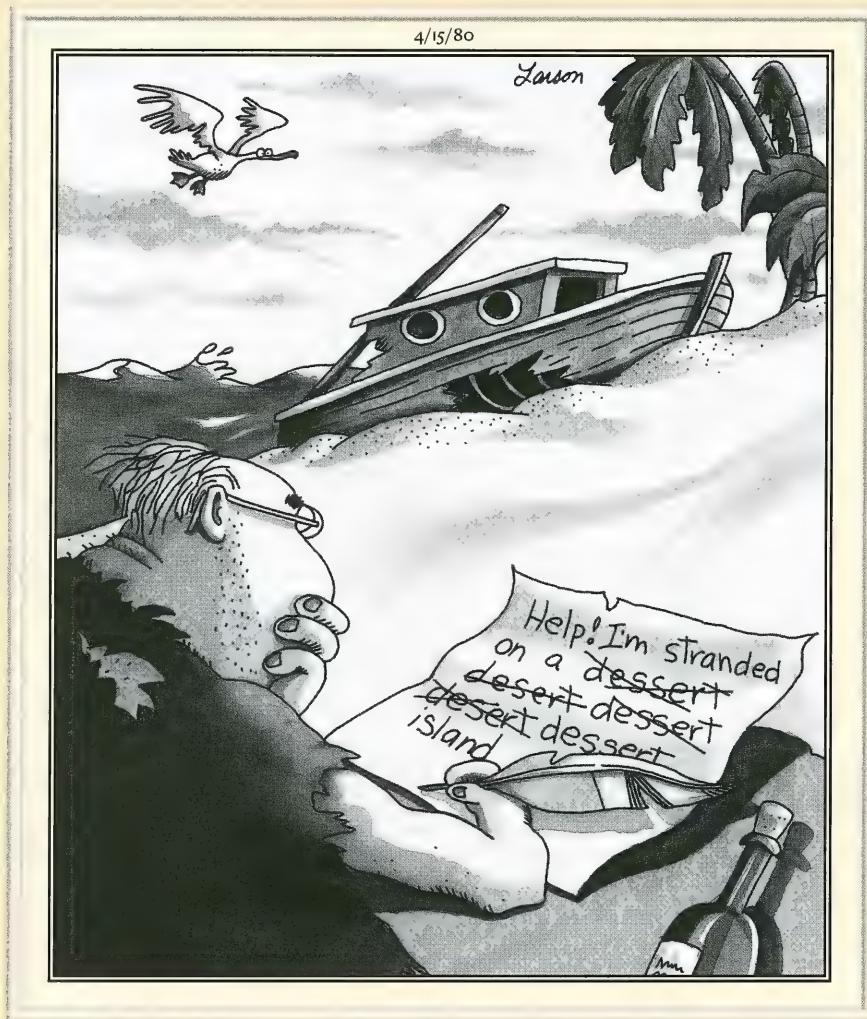
"Oh, Harold! Look! Porpoises!"

"I'm sorry ... try the wizard up the road.  
I just used my last heart and brain."

April 1980



"Most peculiar, Sidney ... another scattering  
of Cub Scout attire."



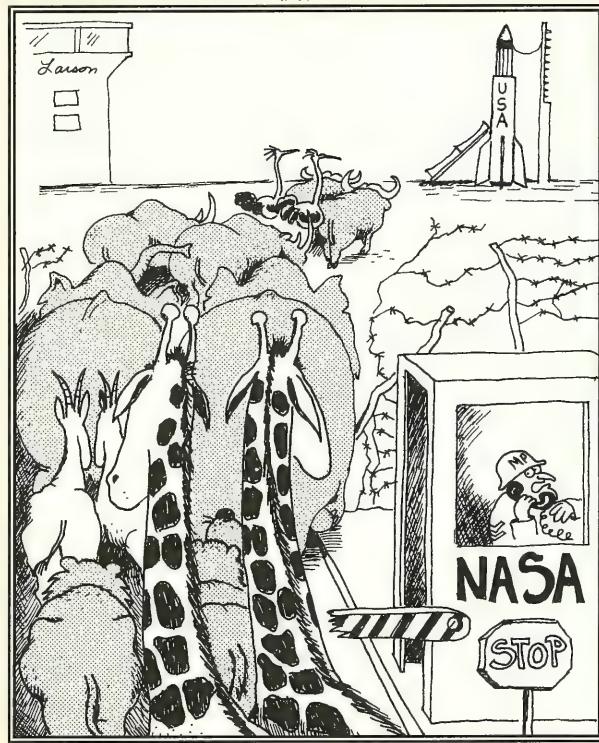
April 1980

4/16/80



"I can't believe it! ... I was just talking to him yesterday!"

4/17/80



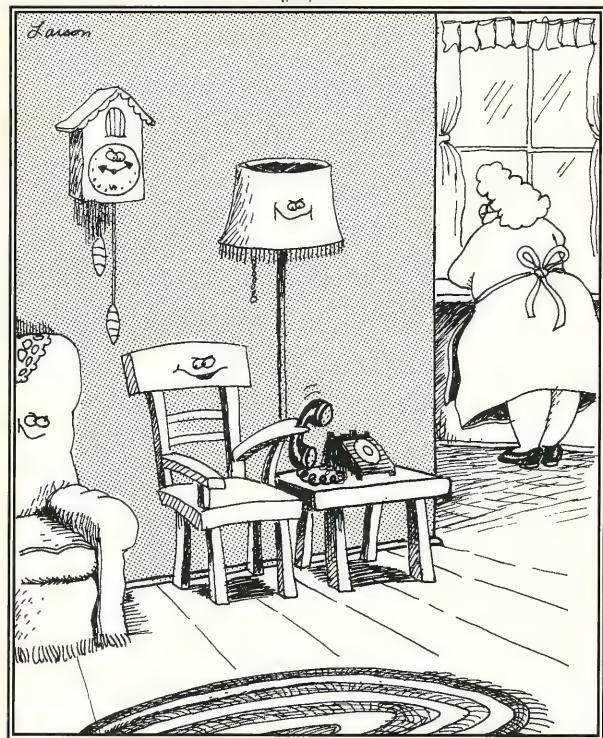
"Something big's going down, sir! ... They're heading your way now!"

4/28/80



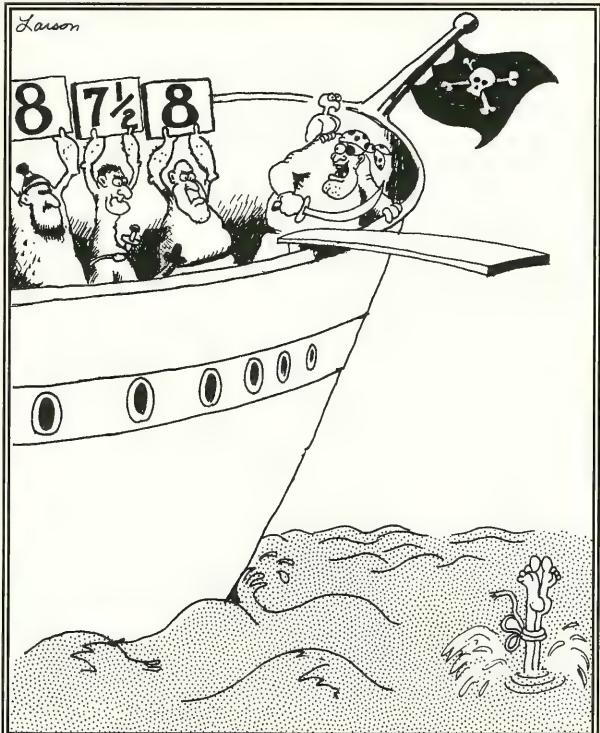
April 1980

4/18/80

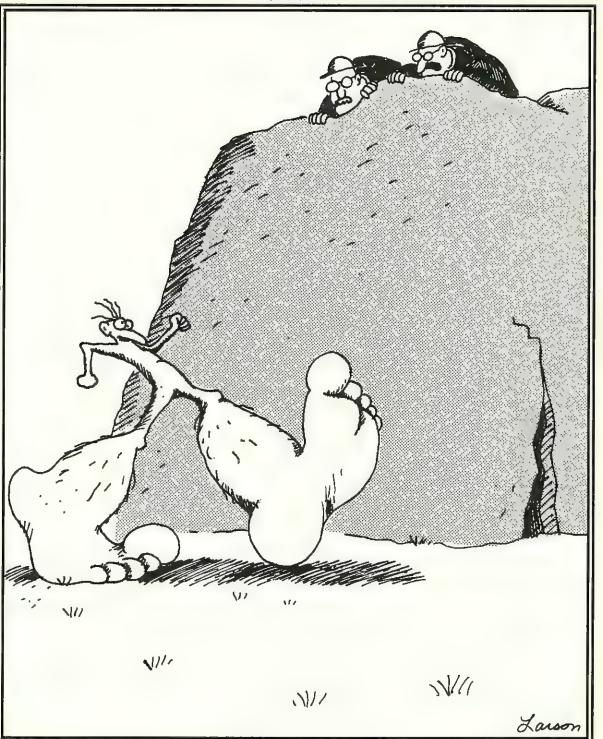


"Okay, the sanatorium's on its way over ...  
all we gotta do now is start talking to her."

4/21/80

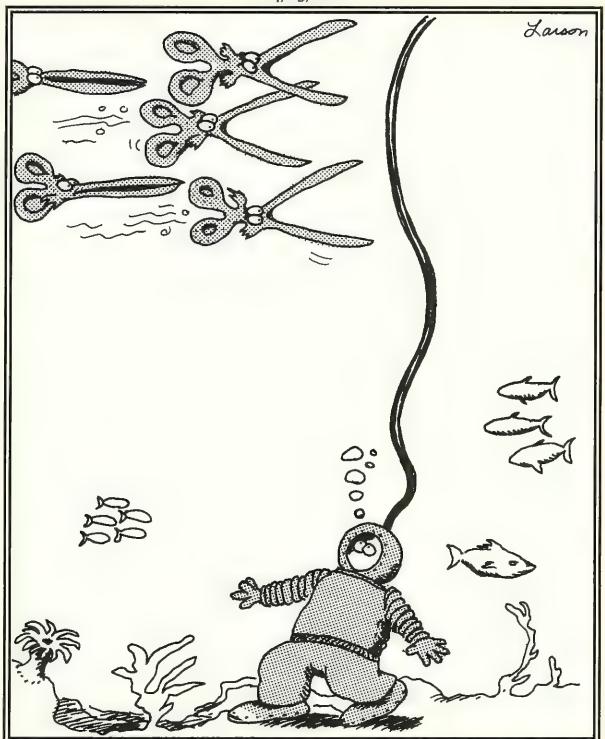


4/22/80



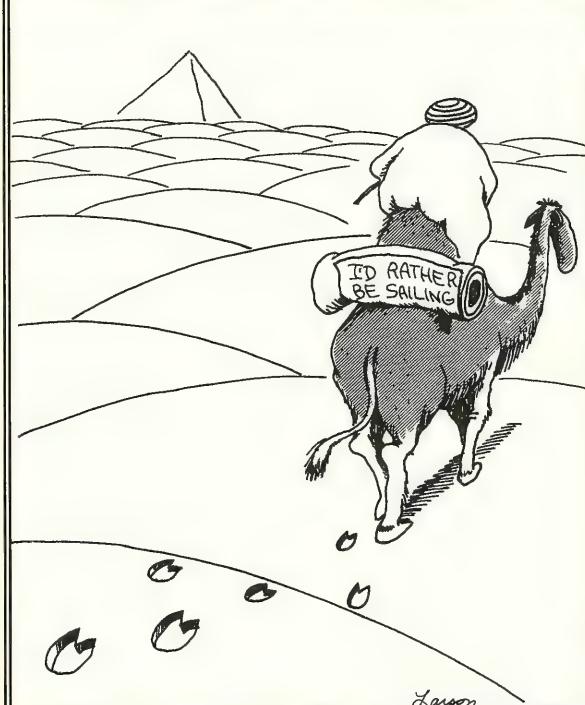
"It certainly has taken the romance out of  
the Bigfoot mystery."

4/23/80



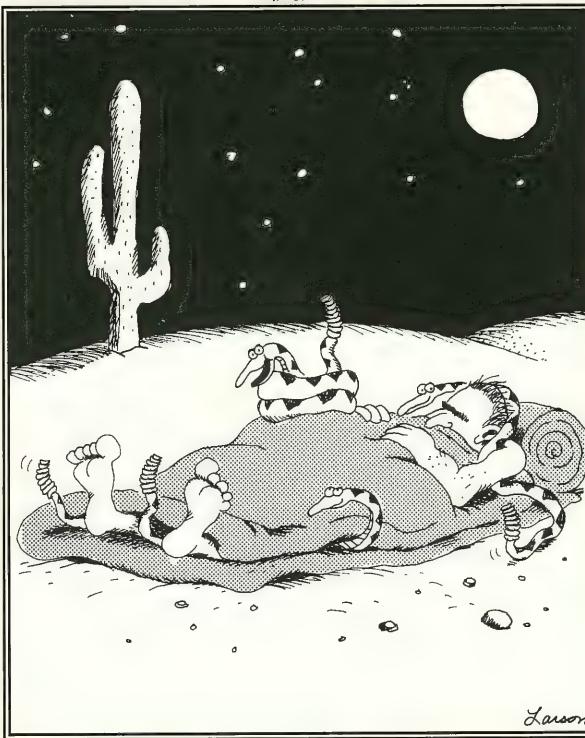
April 1980

4/24/80



Larson

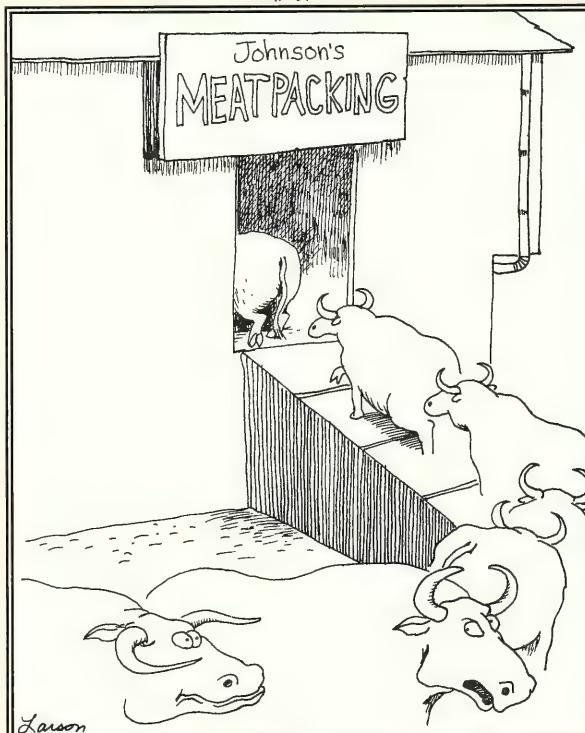
4/25/80



Larson

"Okay ... on the count of three,  
everybody rattles."

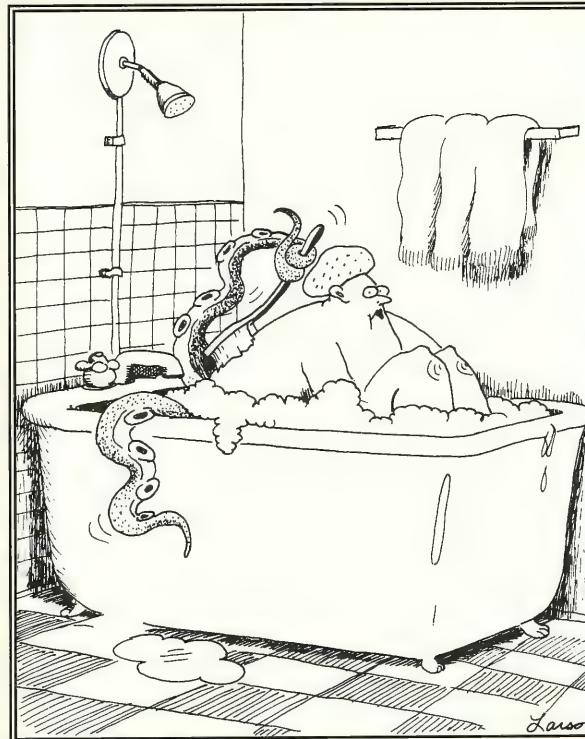
4/29/80



Larson

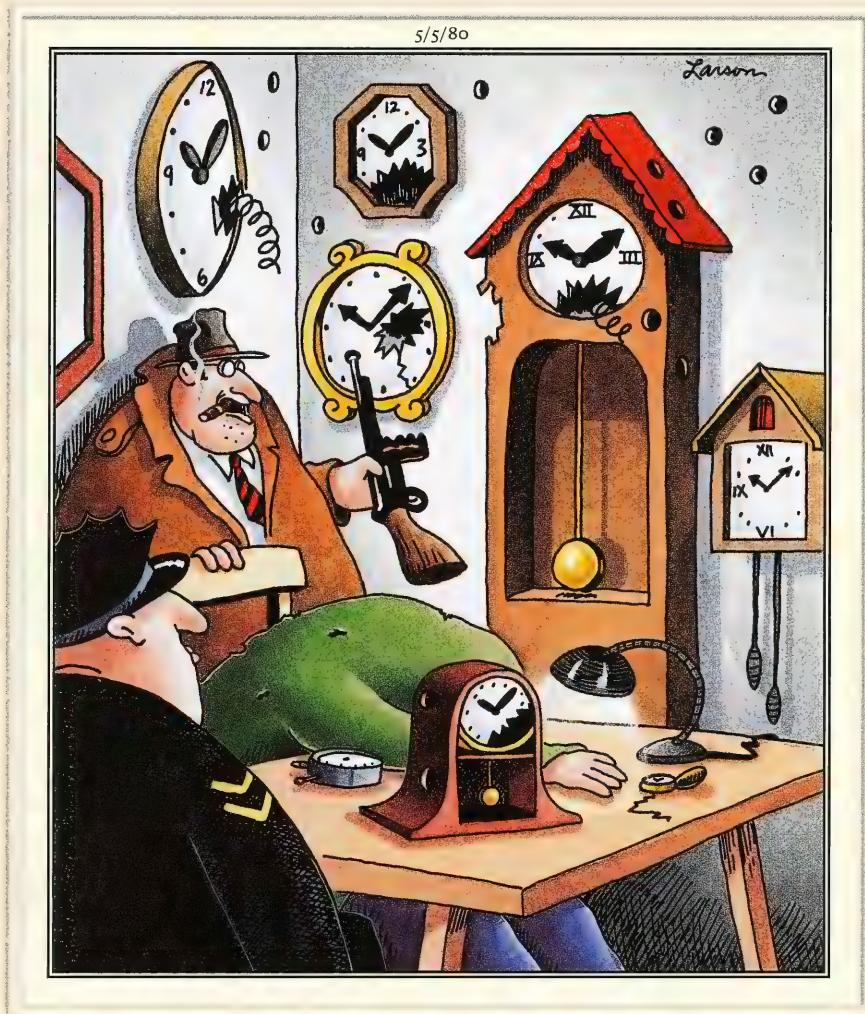
"Just look at this line! ... They'll never  
get me to come back here again!"

4/30/80

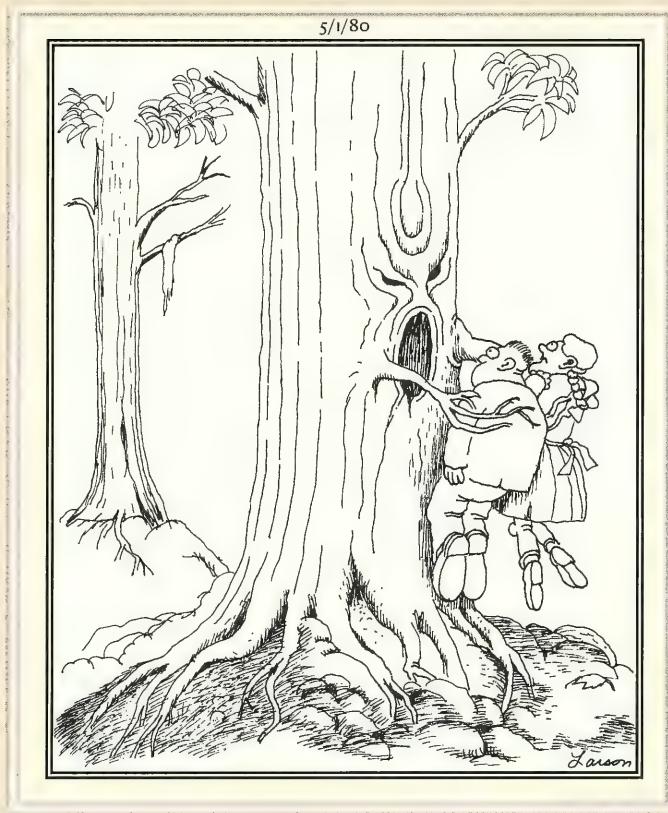


Larson

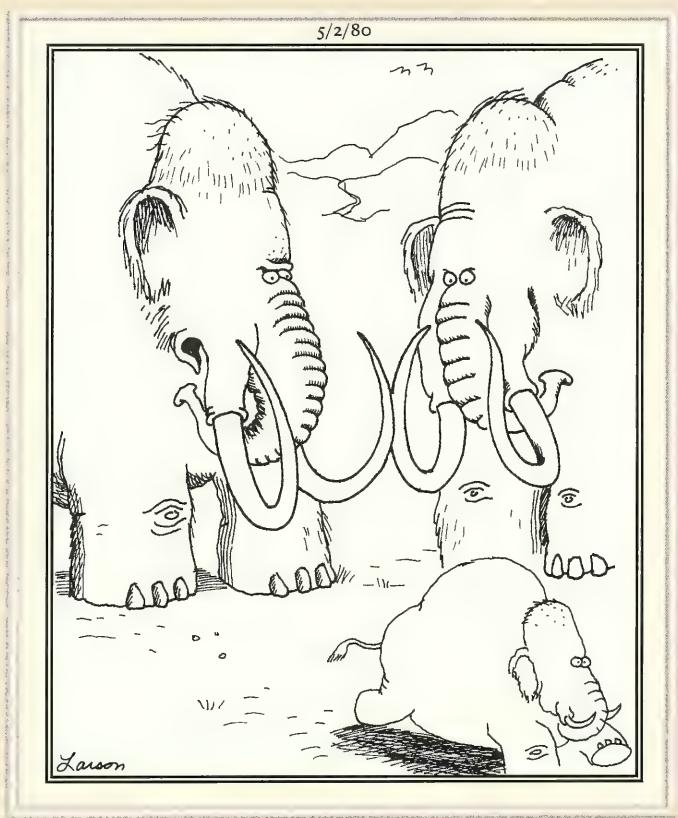
May 1980



"We've got the murder weapon and the motive ...  
now if we can just establish time of death."

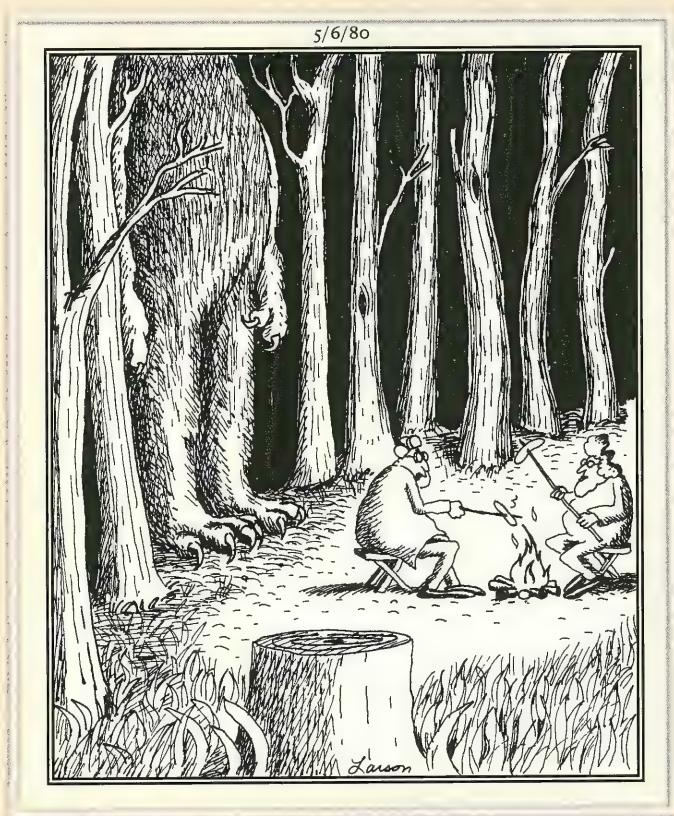


"So! The little sweethearts were going to  
carve their initials on me, eh?"

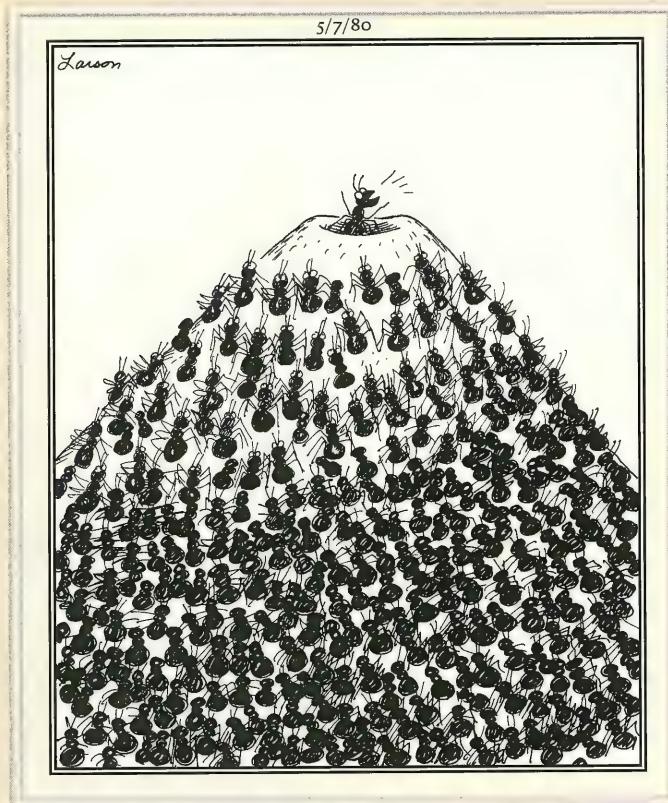


"All right. Run along and play ... and stay  
away from those tar pits!"

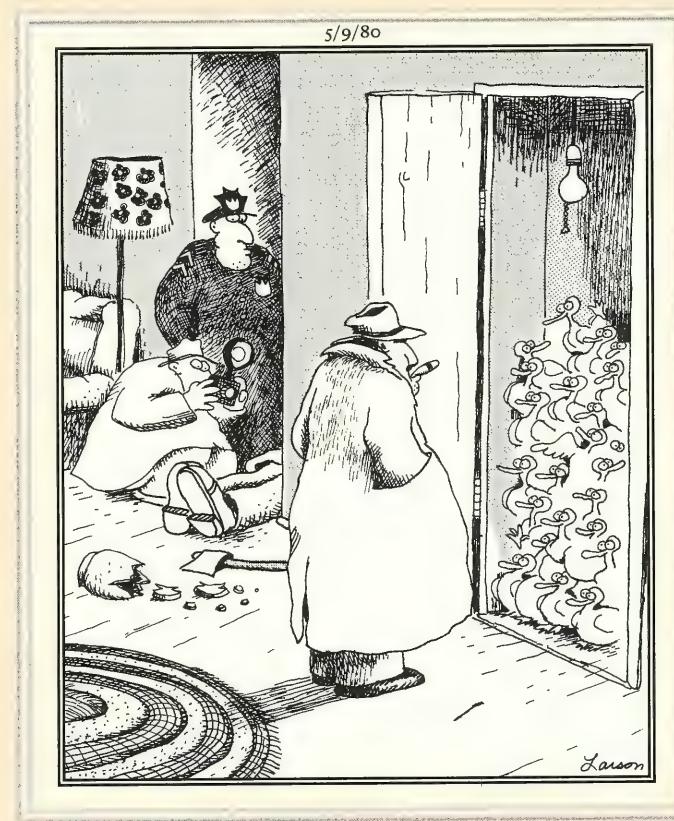
May 1980



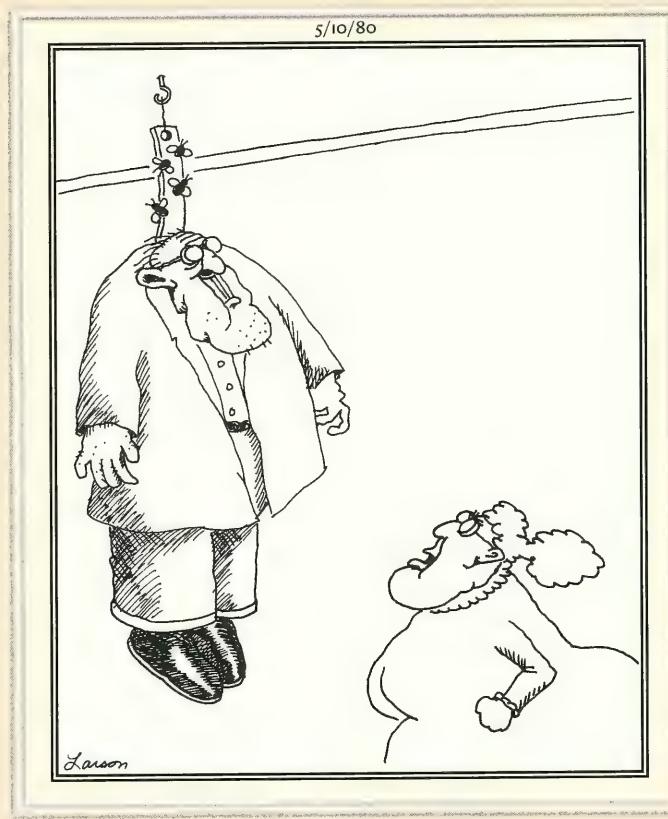
"Thank God! Those blasted crickets have finally stopped!"



"And remember ... ask *not* what your anthill can do for you, but what you can do for your anthill."



"Ahhh ... the plot thickens."



"So! You've been buzzing around the living room again, haven't you?"

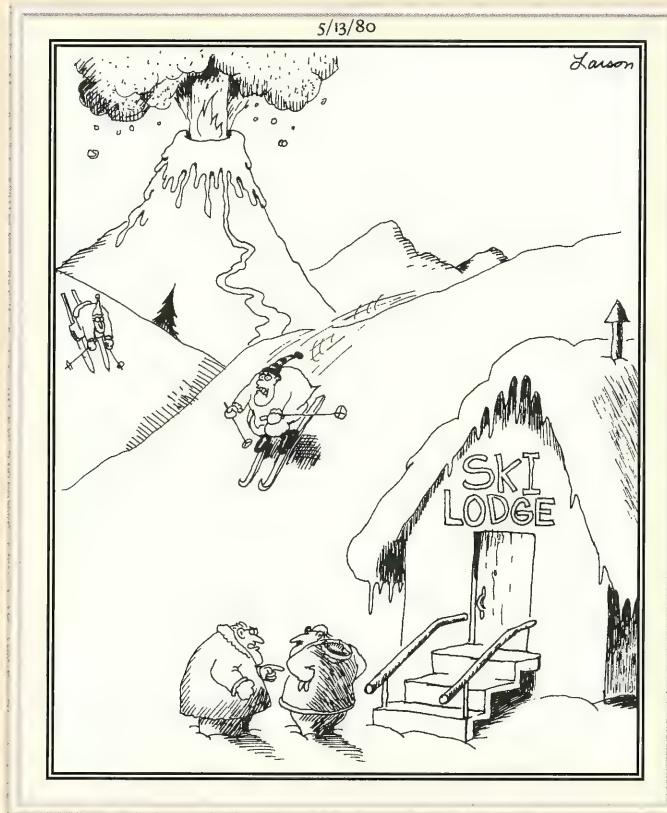
May 1980

5/8/80



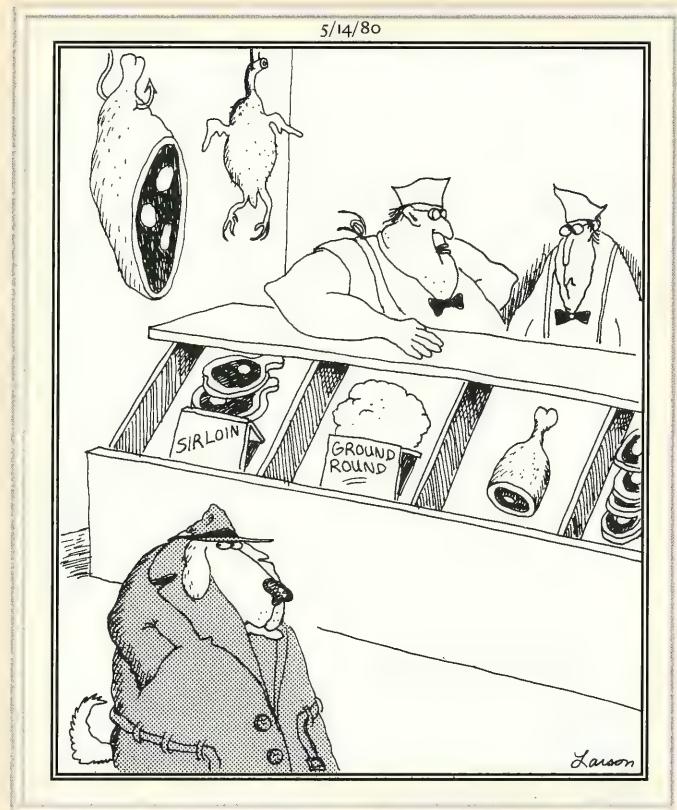
"I used to be somebody ... big executive ... my own company ... and then one day someone yelled,  
'Hey! He's just a big cockroach!'"

5/13/80



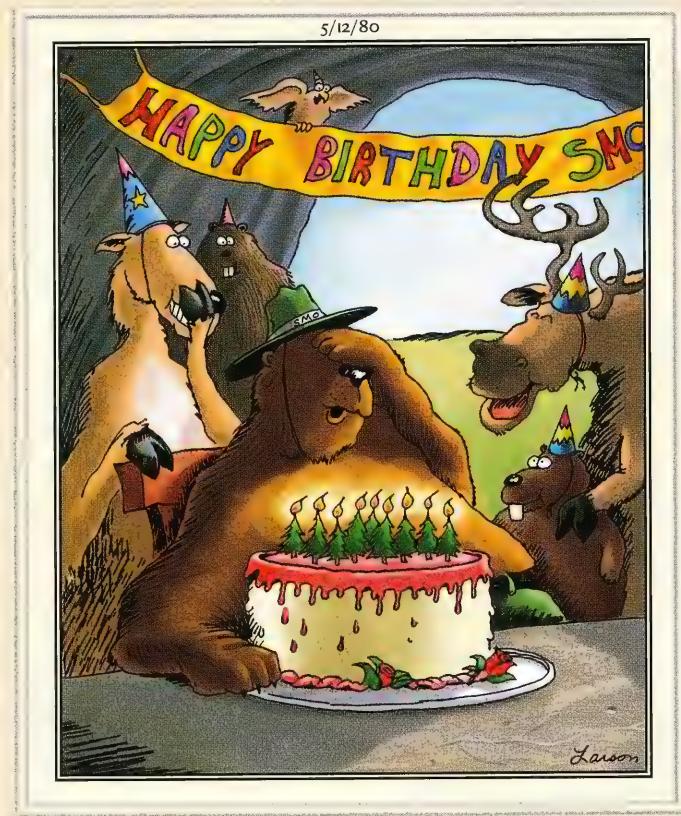
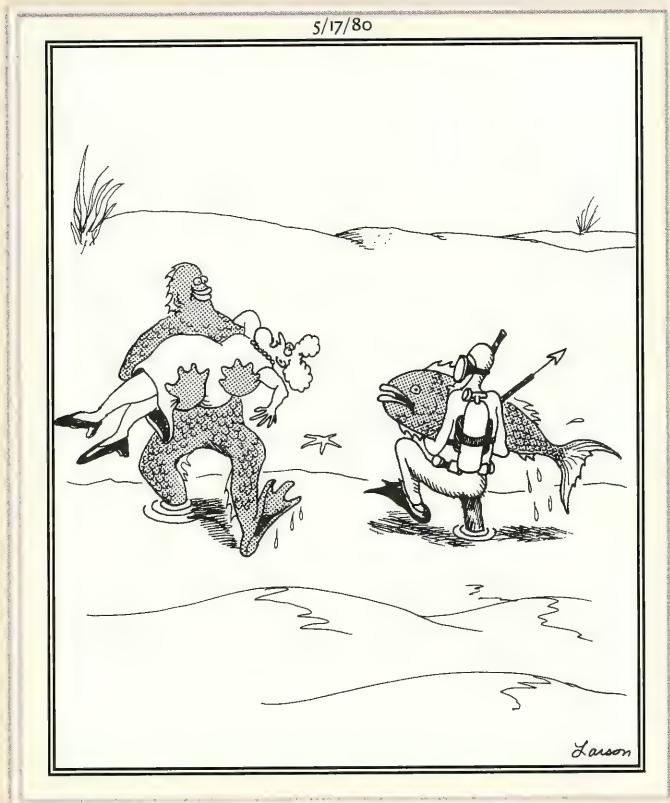
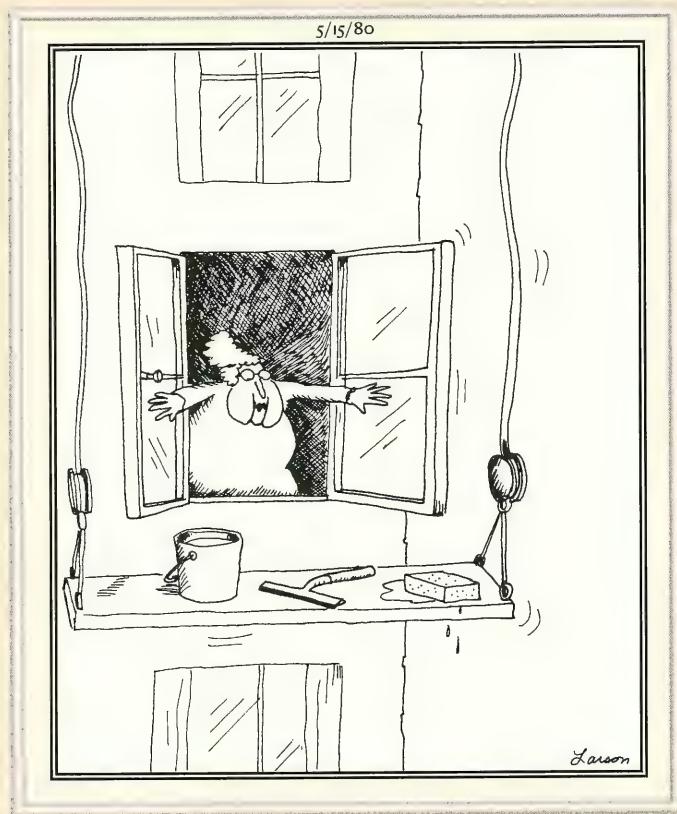
"Me? This year it was *your* turn to go up and sacrifice the goat!"

5/14/80

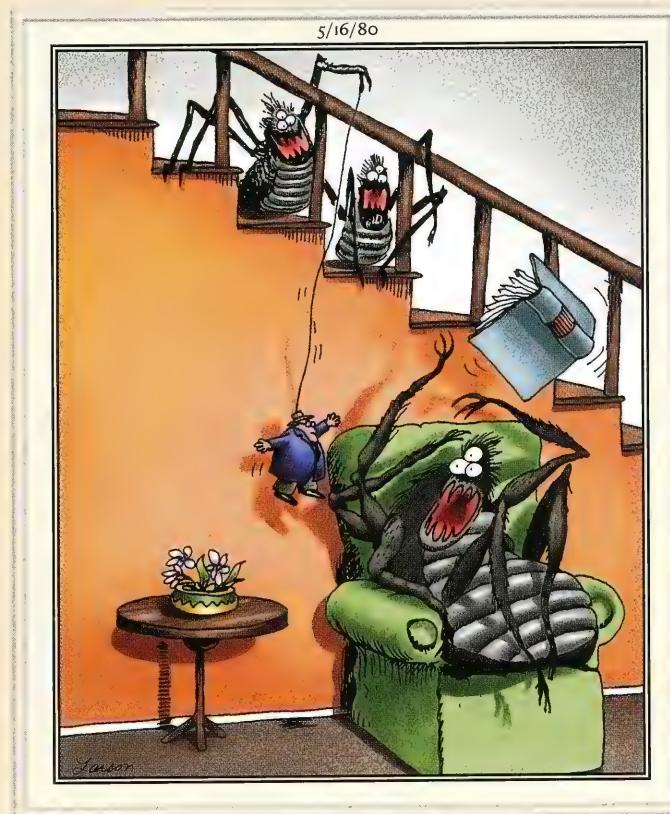


"Keep your eye on that guy. ... He hasn't said or bought a thing for over an hour."

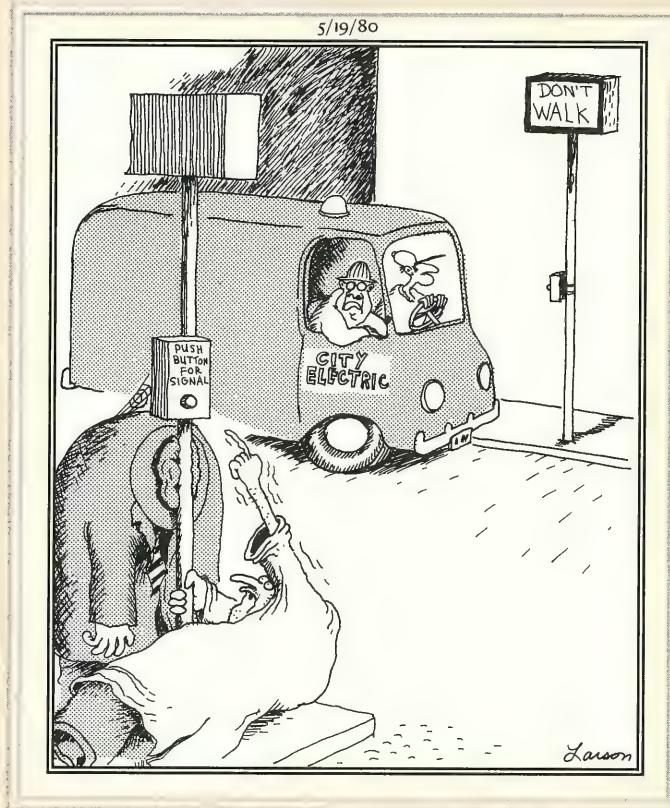
May 1980



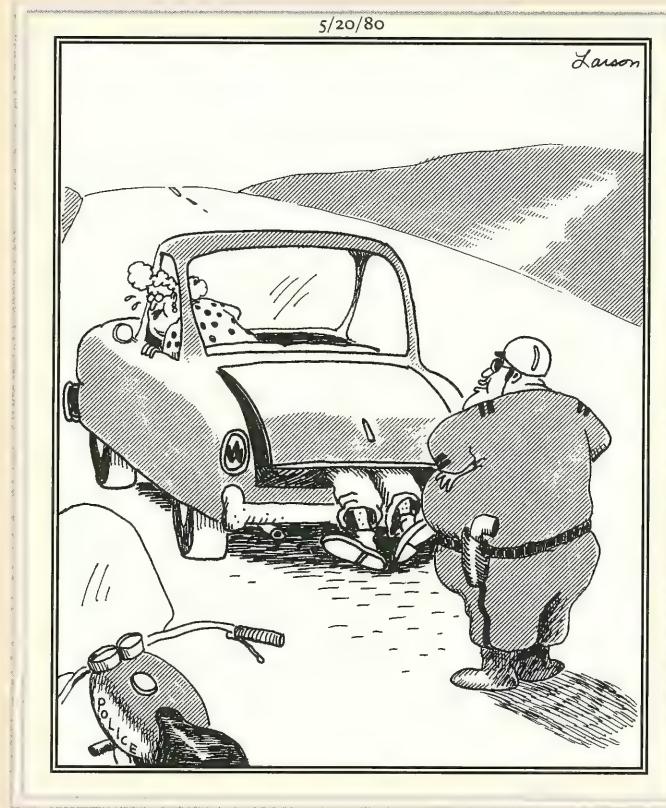
"Can I look now?"



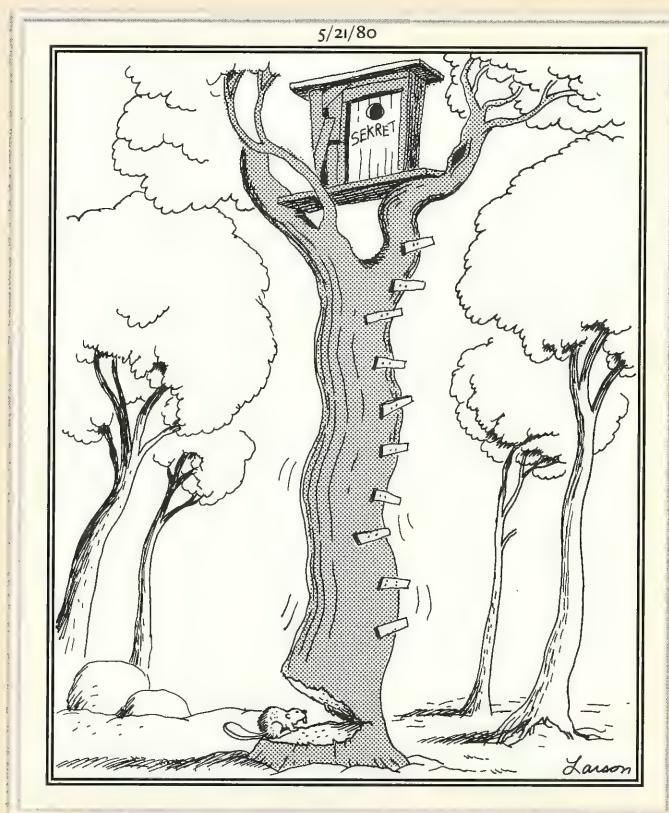
May 1980



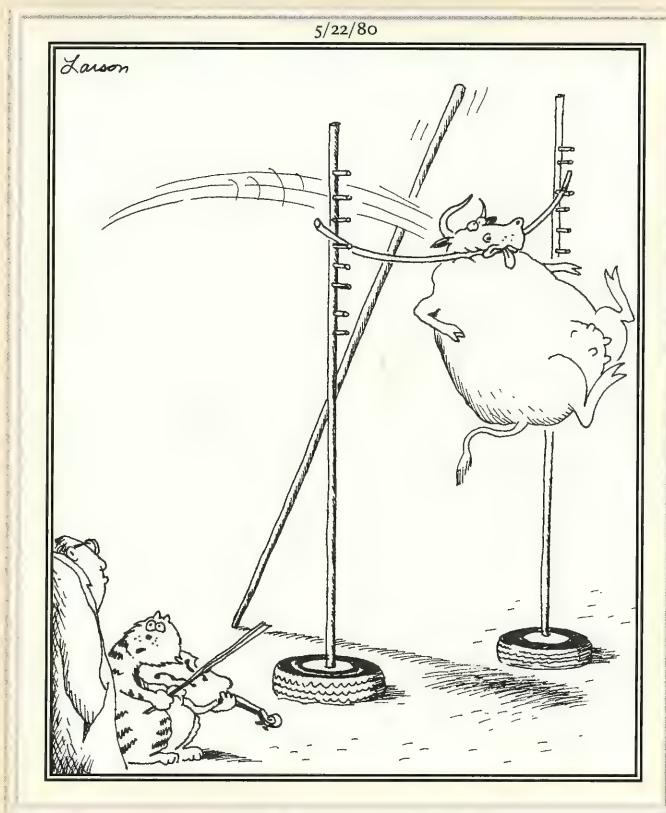
"This is the place, all right ... and it looks like it's been stuck on 'Don't Walk' for some time."



"Well, well, well—what do we have here? ... I do believe it's a broken taillight."

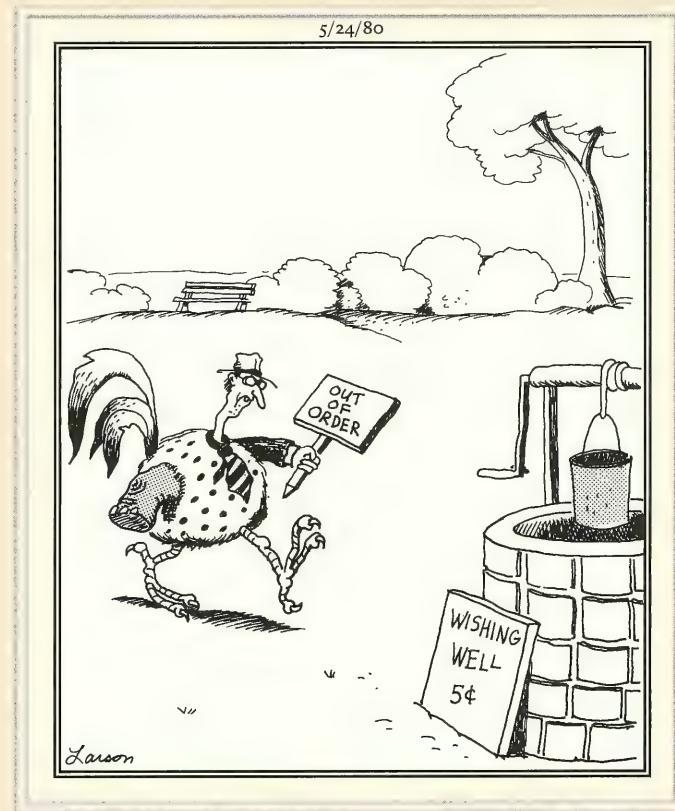
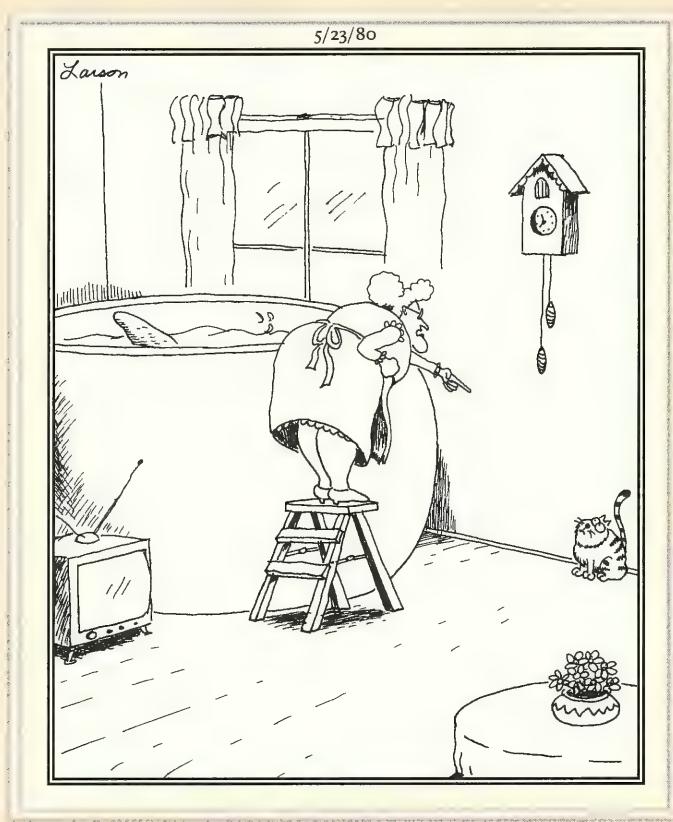


"Okay—those that want to call our new club 'The Buccaneers' raise their ... Hey! Who's the wise guy that keeps cracking his knuckles?"

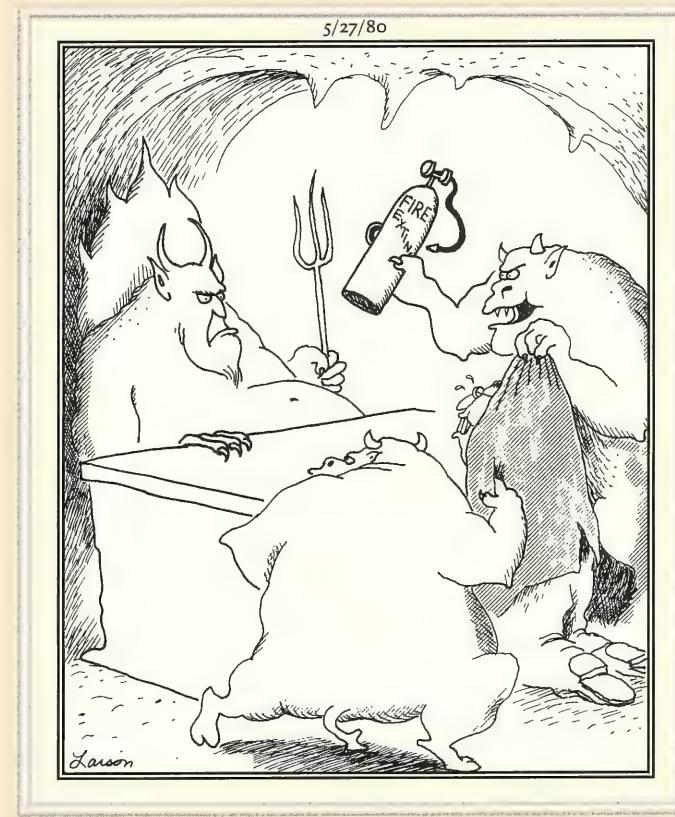
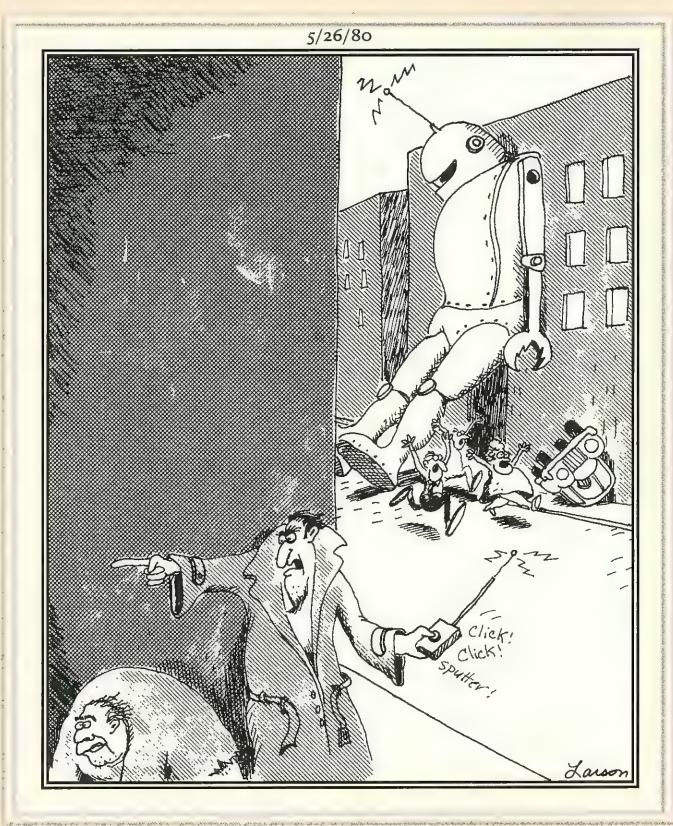


"We've still got a couple of years to go before we're ready for the moon."

May 1980



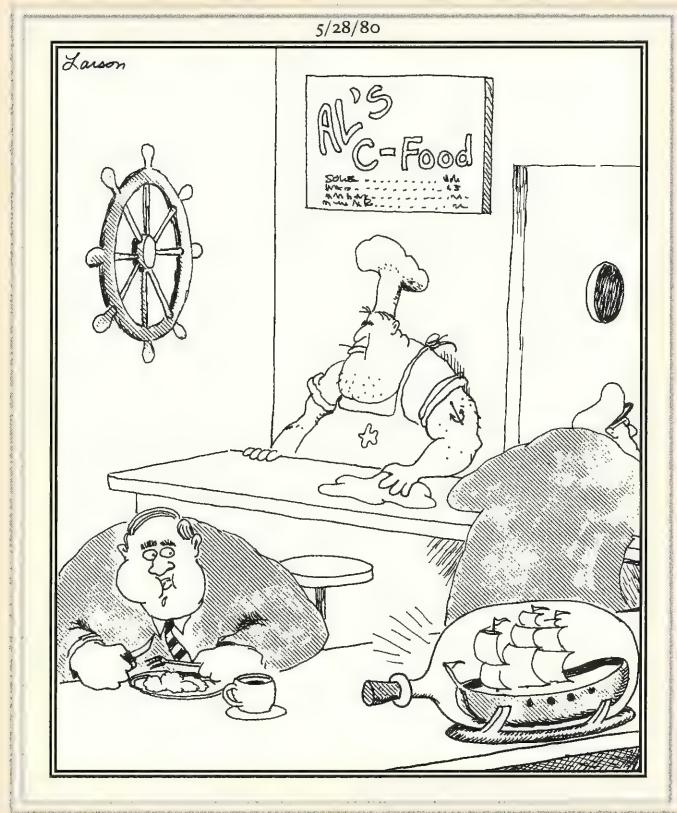
"And remember—I don't want to catch  
you bothering the fish!"



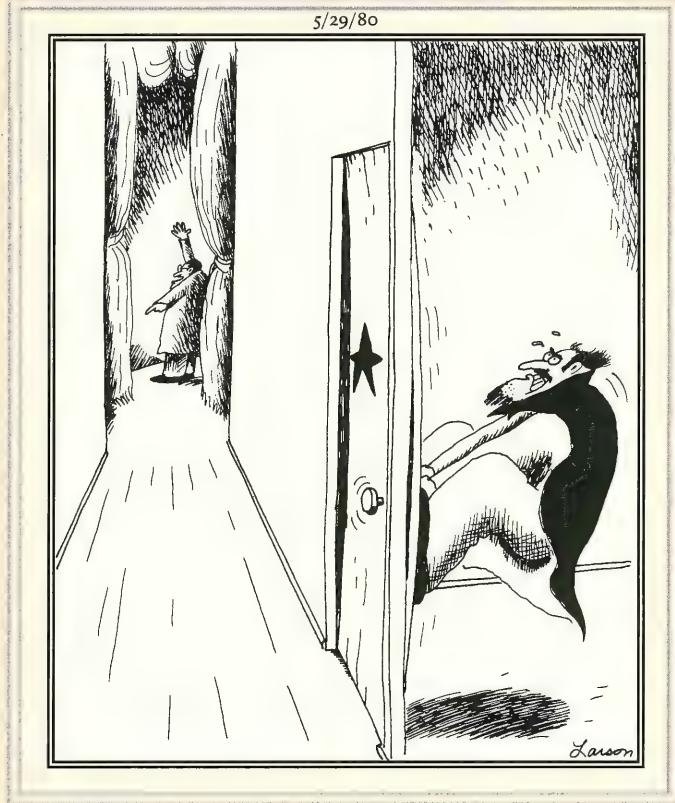
"Yes, sir ... we caught him trying to smuggle  
this in under his coat."

"Curses! ... Quick, Igor! Run down to the store  
and get two size D flashlight batteries!"

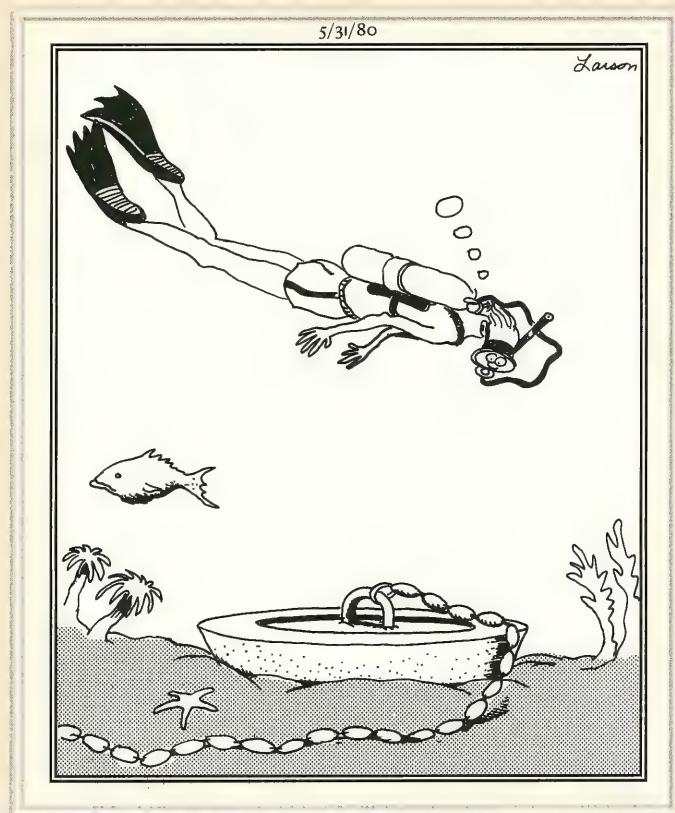
May 1980



"Okay, it's settled—tonight at midnight,  
when the place is closed, we sail!"

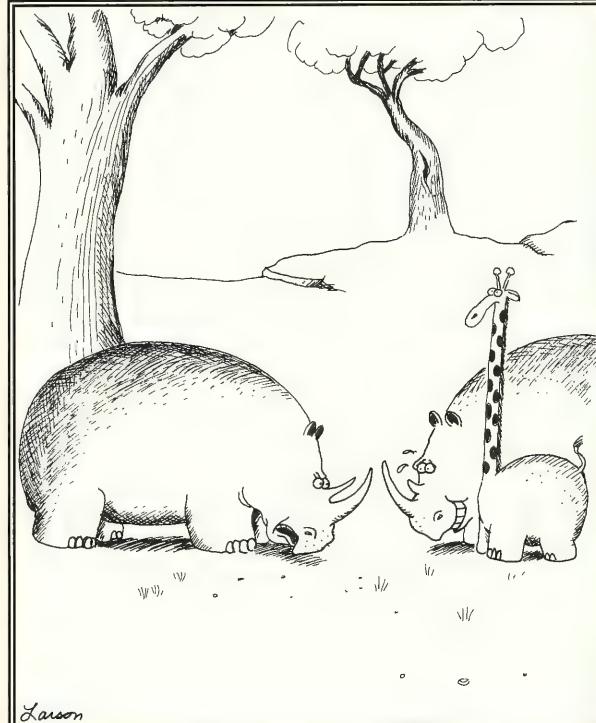


"And now, ladies and gentlemen, I give you  
the world's greatest escape artist ...  
THE GREAT WALDO!"



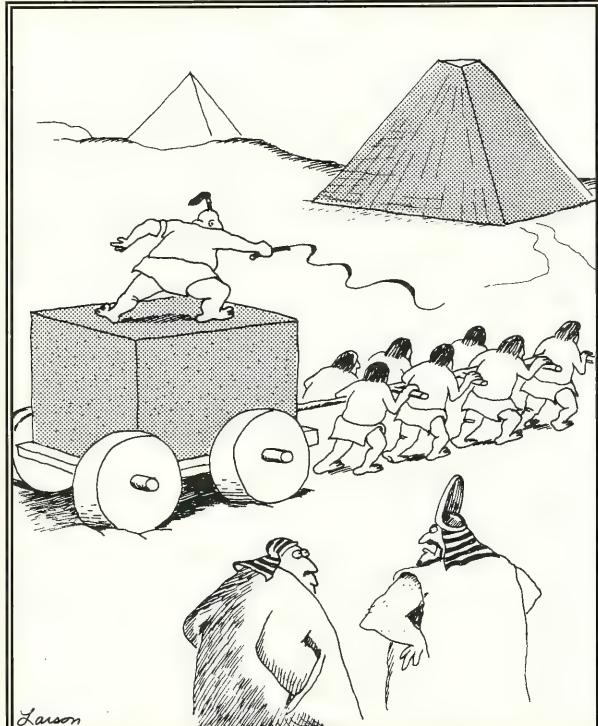
June 1980

6/2/80



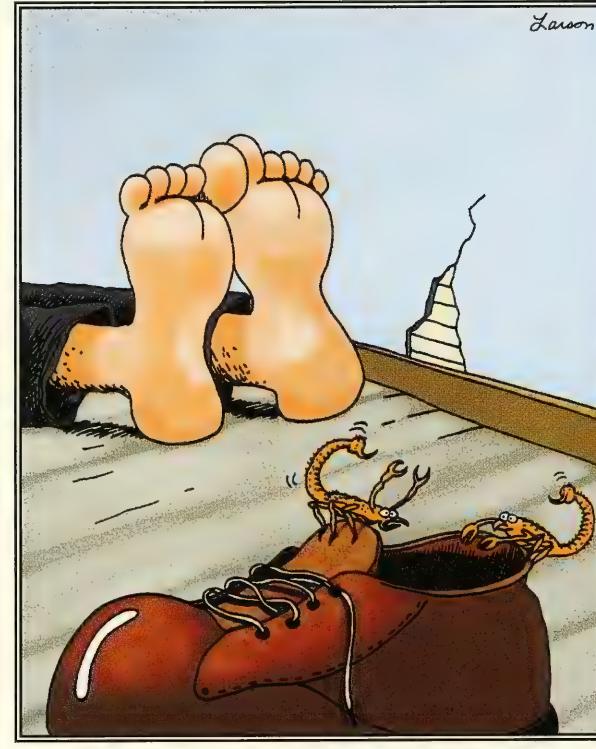
"There's something different about that kid."

6/4/80



"Well, if it'll keep my razor blades sharp,  
that's all I ask."

6/3/80



"There I was—asleep in this little cave here,  
when suddenly I was attacked by this  
hideous thing with five heads!"

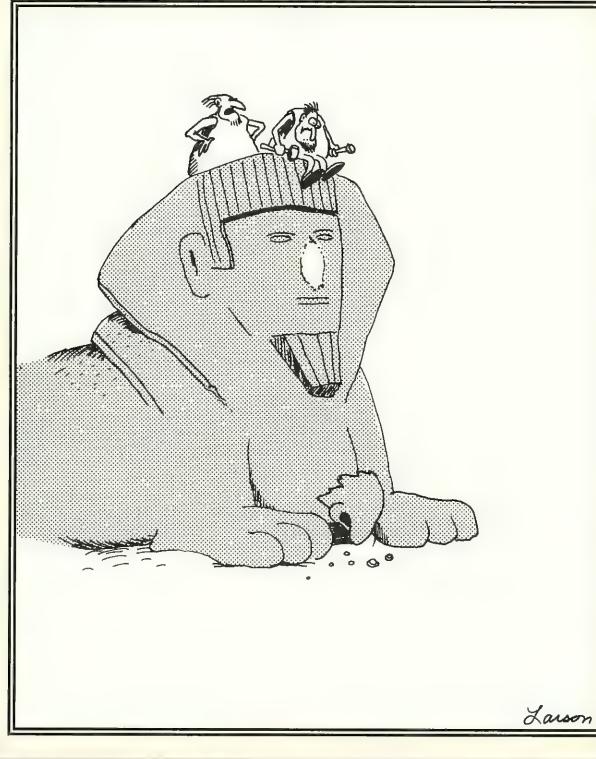
6/5/80



"Oh, Mrs. Oswald ... you've forgotten  
something again."

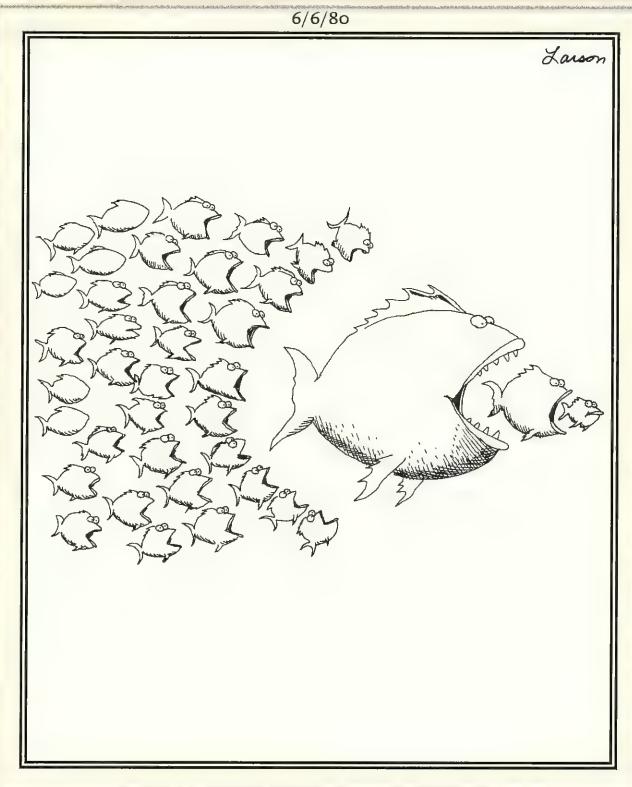
June 1980

6/9/80

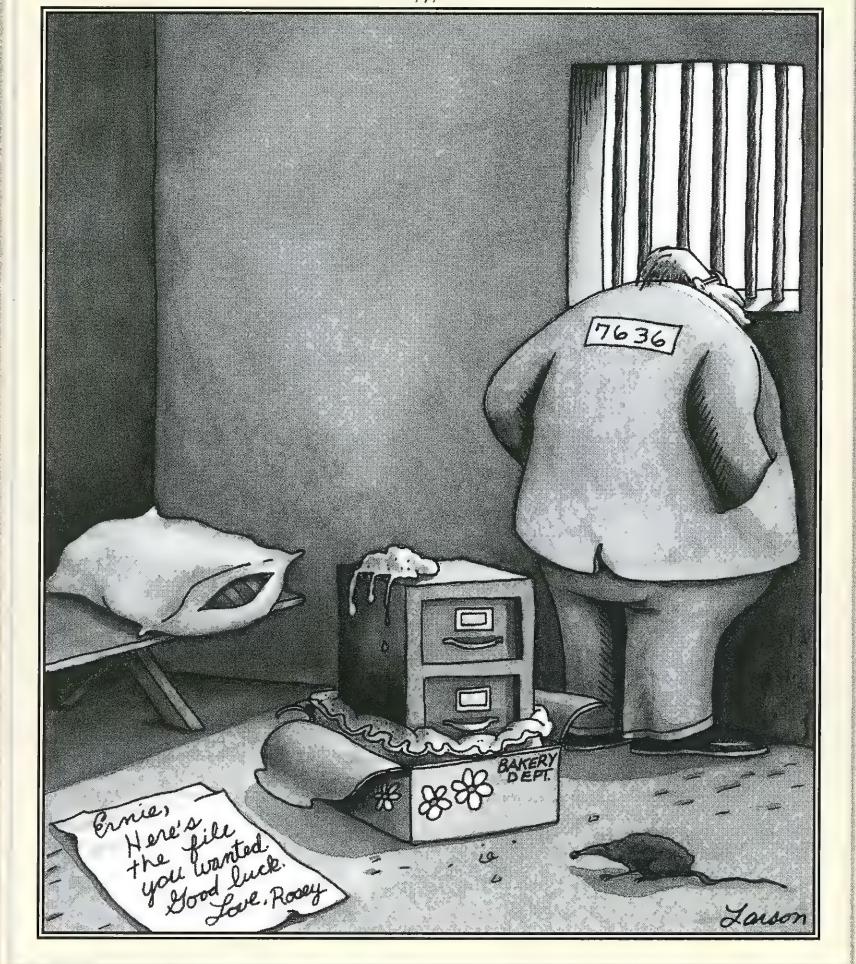


"That's fine," I said. "Good nose," I said.  
But no, you had to go and hit the  
chisel one more time."

6/6/80

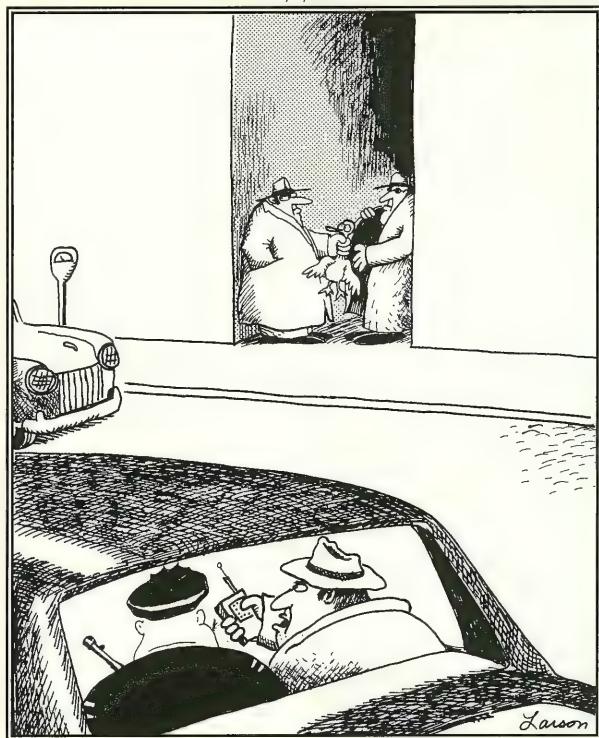


6/7/80



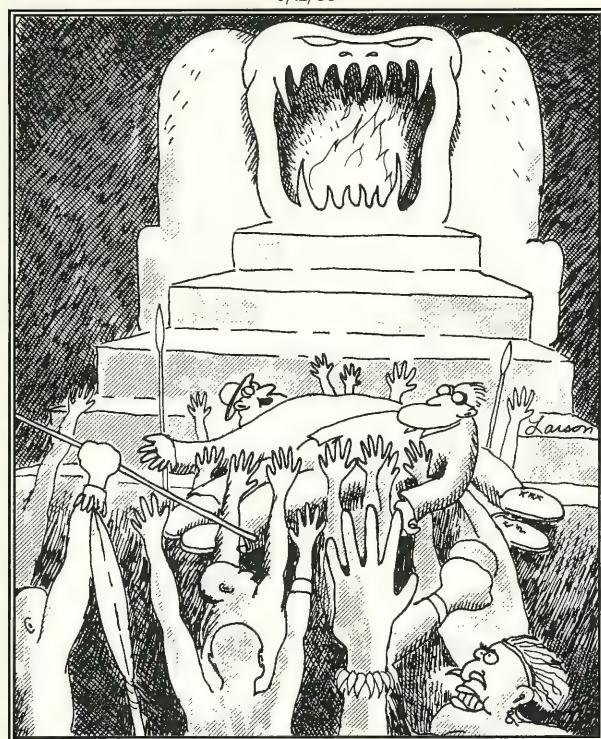
June 1980

6/11/80



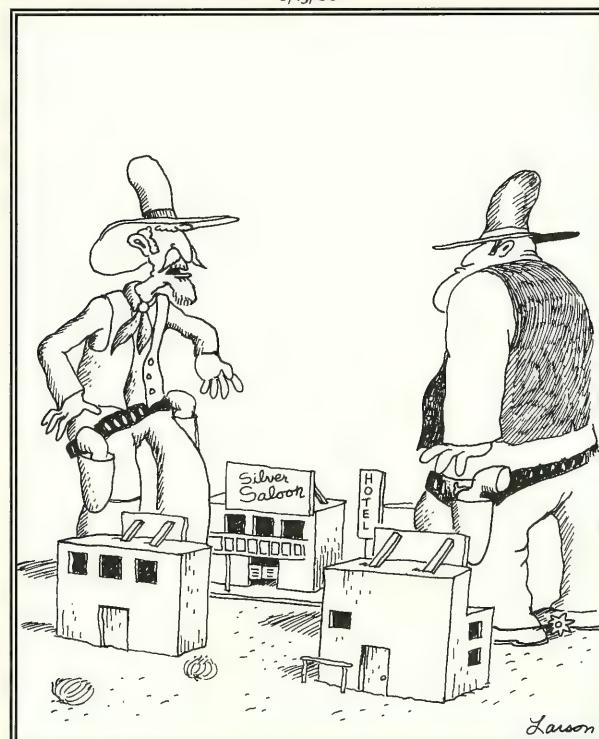
"All units prepare to move in! ... He's givin'  
him the duck now!"

6/12/80



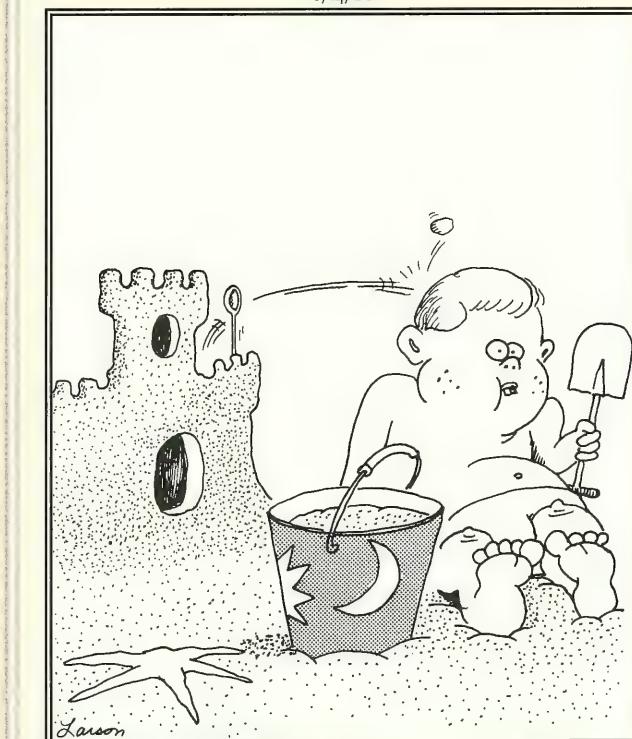
"By Jove, Andrew! ... It's just like being the  
heroes of some football game!"

6/13/80



"This town ain't big enough for  
both of us, Redeye."

6/14/80



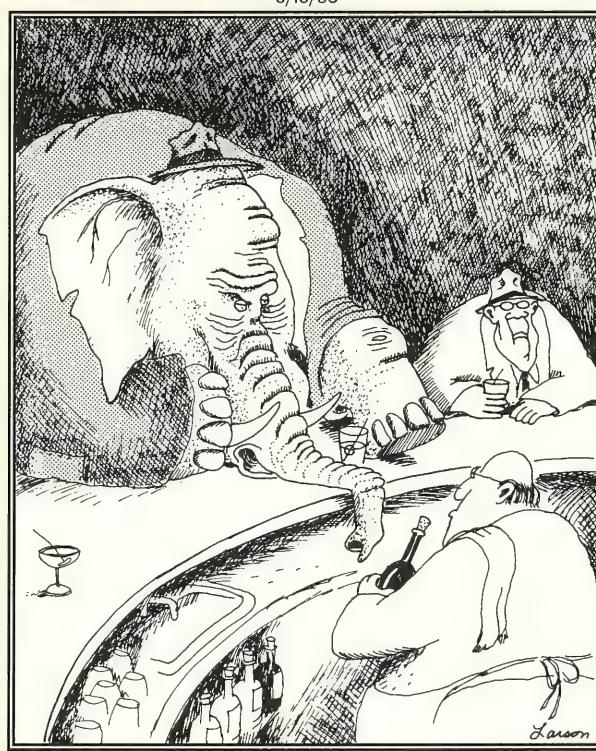
June 1980

6/10/80



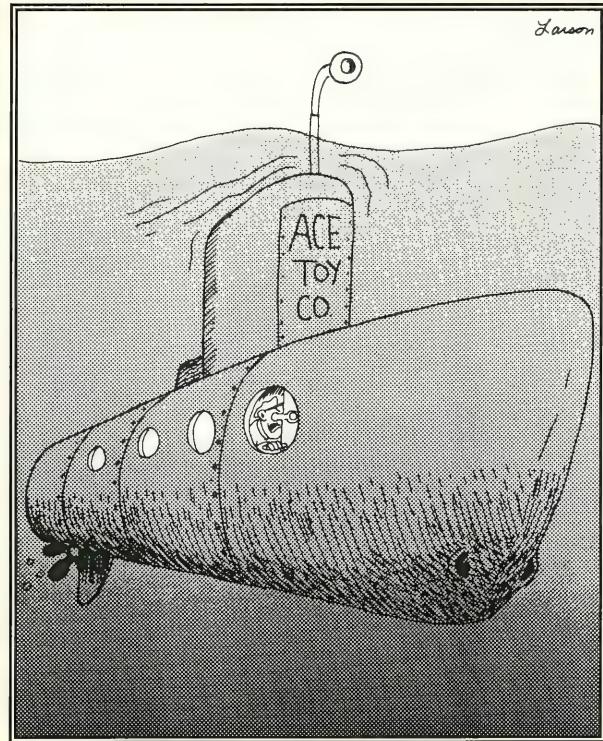
"And the last gladiator left alive will win the contest.  
But first ... the egg-toss!"

6/16/80



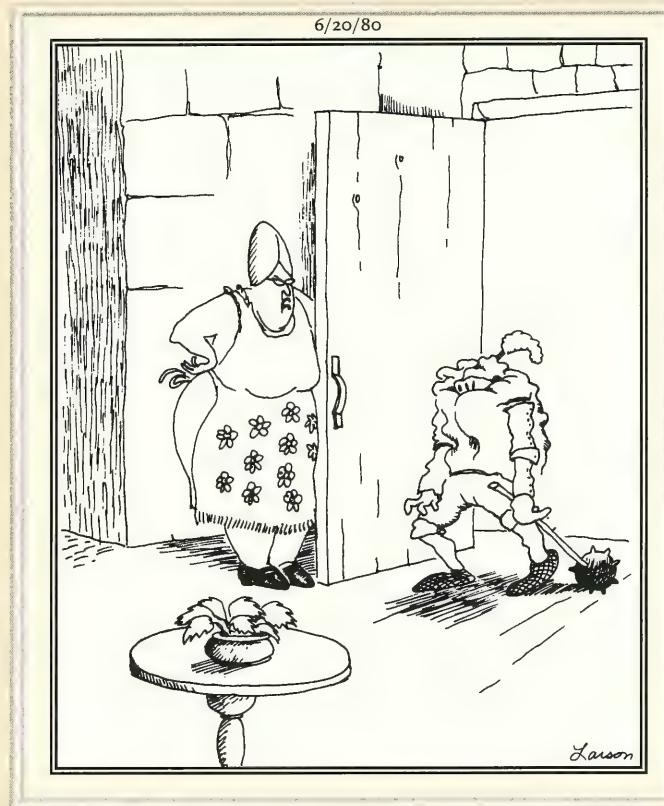
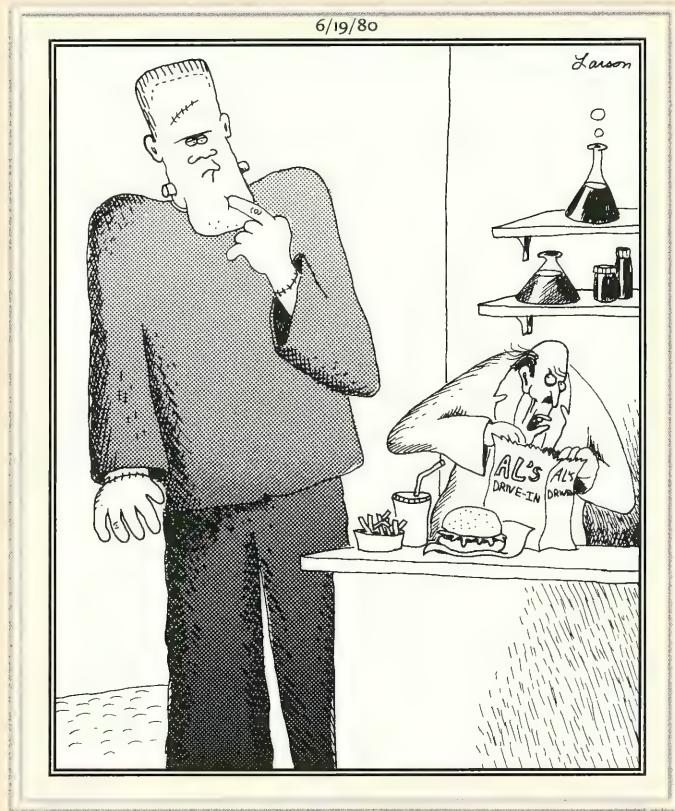
"It's no use. I drink and I drink, and I  
still can't forget."

6/17/80



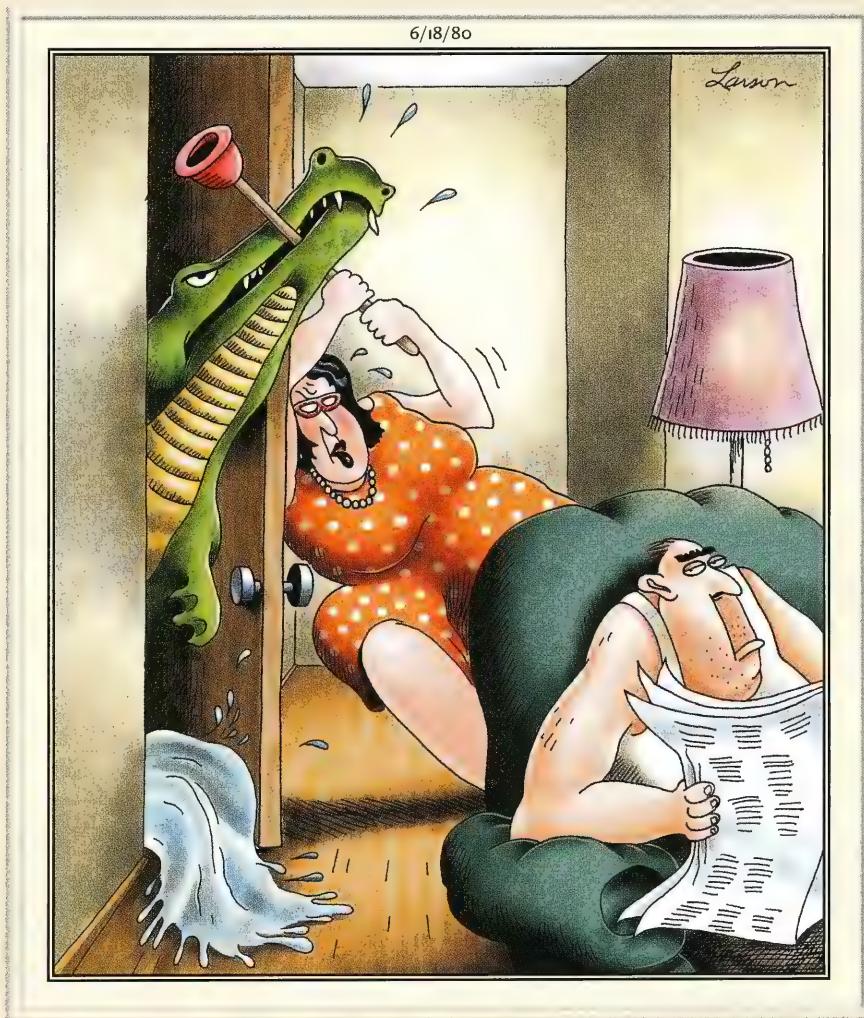
"Get ready! He's put the rubber ducky down  
and now he's reaching for the bar of soap!"

June 1980



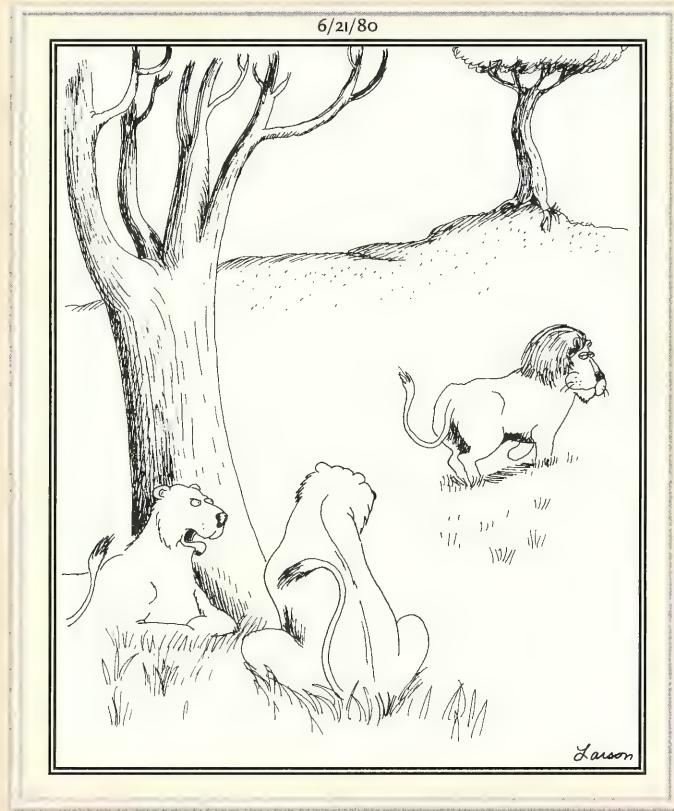
"So! You've been fighting again! ...  
And in your new suit, too!"

"What? No tartar sauce? ... You'd forget your  
own head if it wasn't bolted on!"

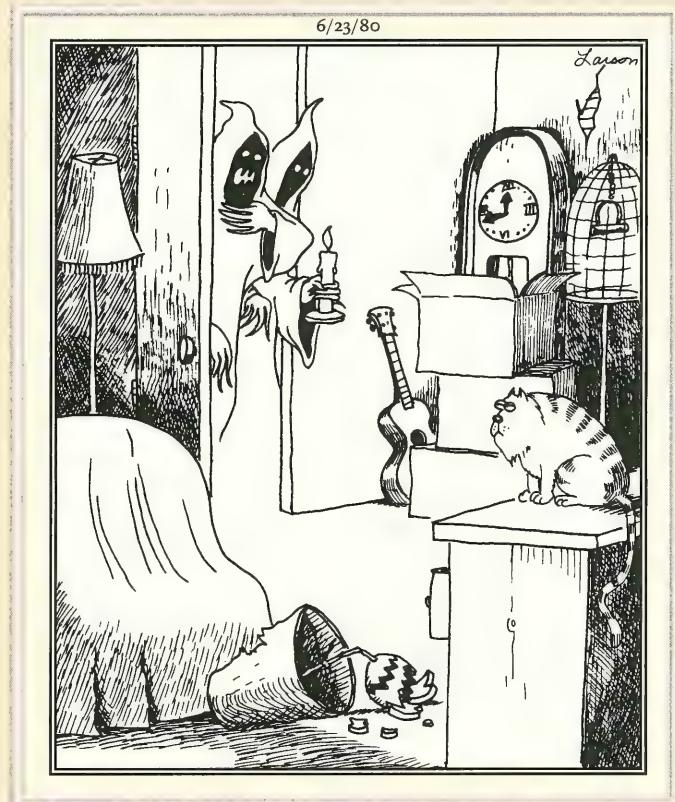


"Curse this New York City sewer system! ...  
It's backing up again."

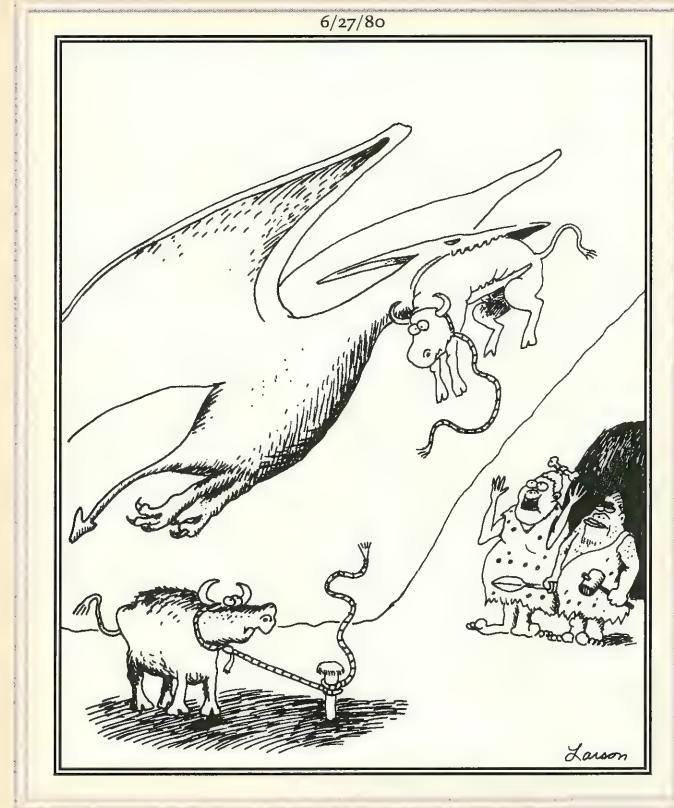
June 1980



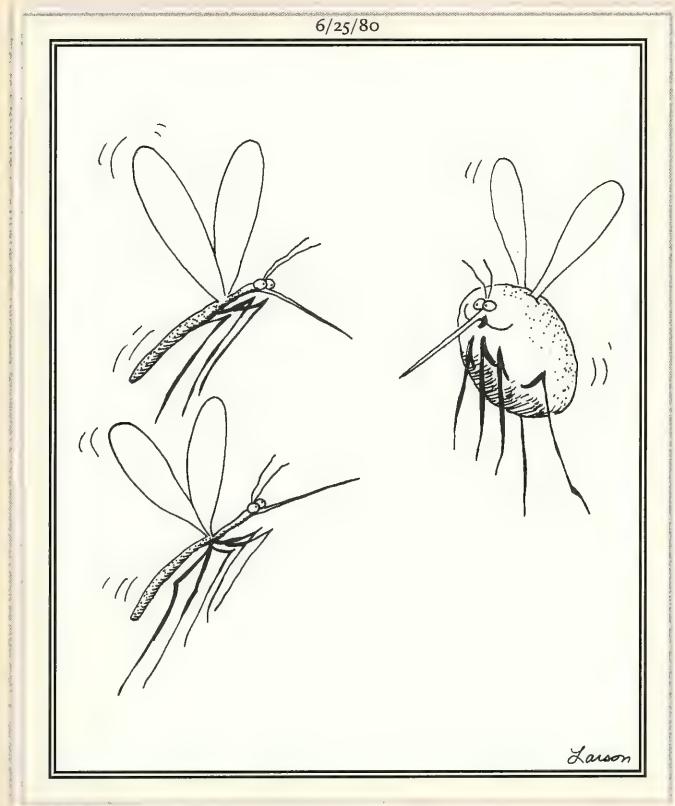
"Nice guy ... except for that zebra-breath."



"Thank God! ... It was only a cat!"



"Oh Thorg! The new bird feeder is wonderful!"



"Head five miles west until you come to a river, then fly upstream about a mile until you come to the sign 'Sunshine Nudist Camp.'"

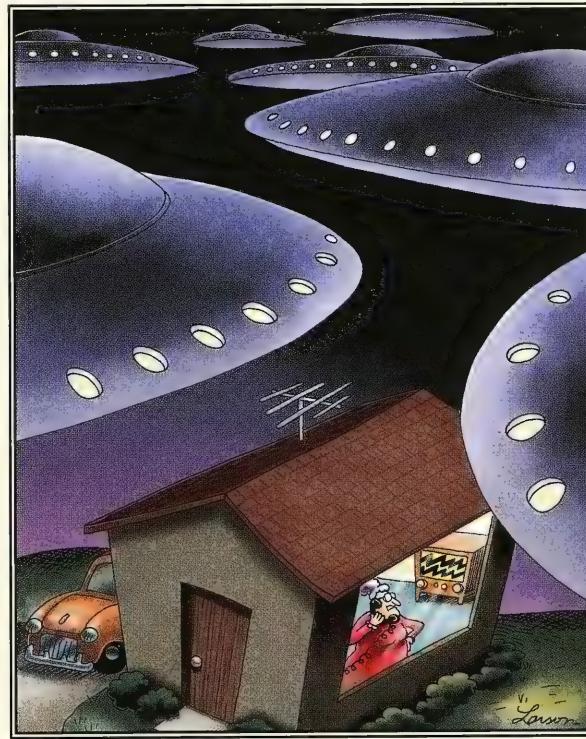
June 1980

6/24/80



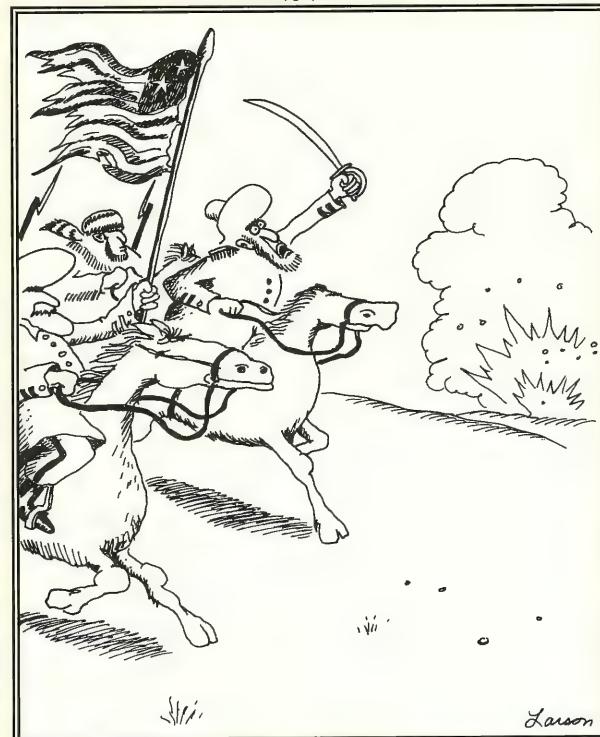
"You'll never get away with this!"

6/26/80



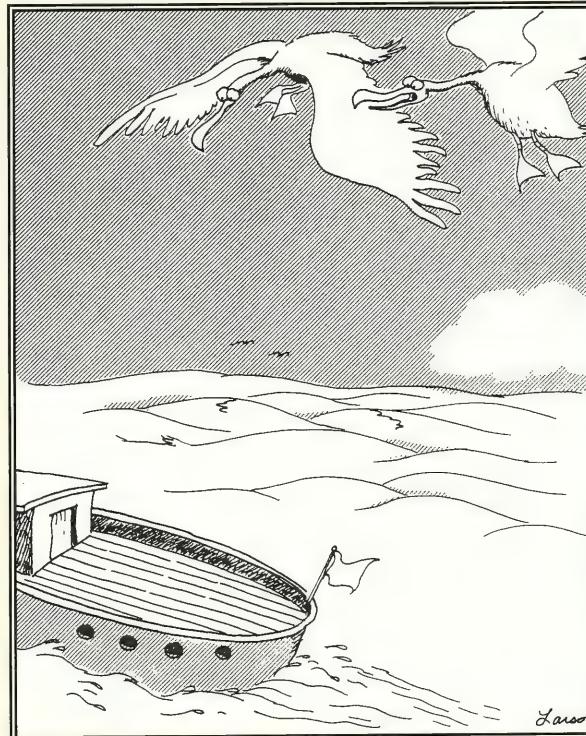
"Yeah, Sylvia—my set too. ... And in the middle of *Laverne and Shirley*."

6/30/80



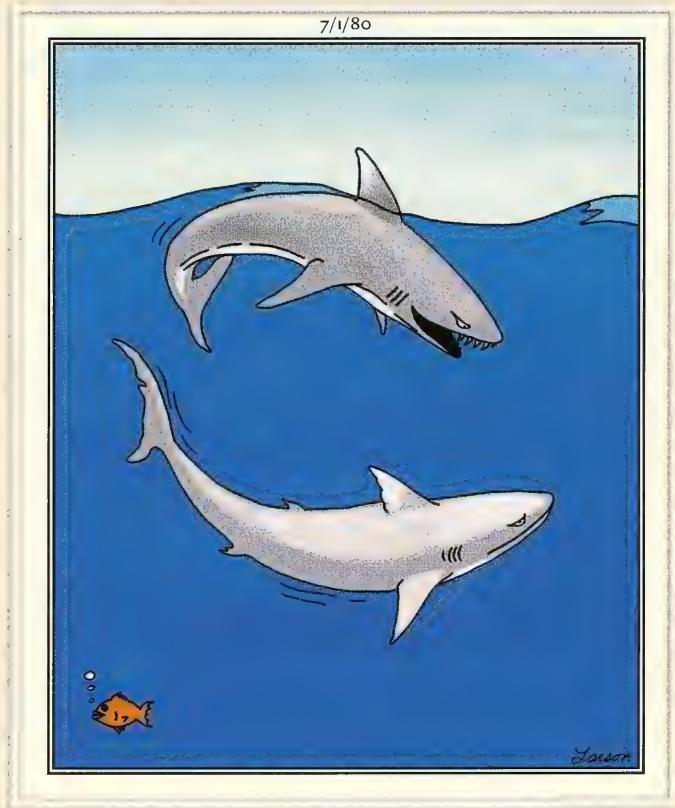
"REMEMBER THE ... uh ... REMEMBER THE ...  
REMEMBER THAT PLACE IN TEXAS!"

6/28/80

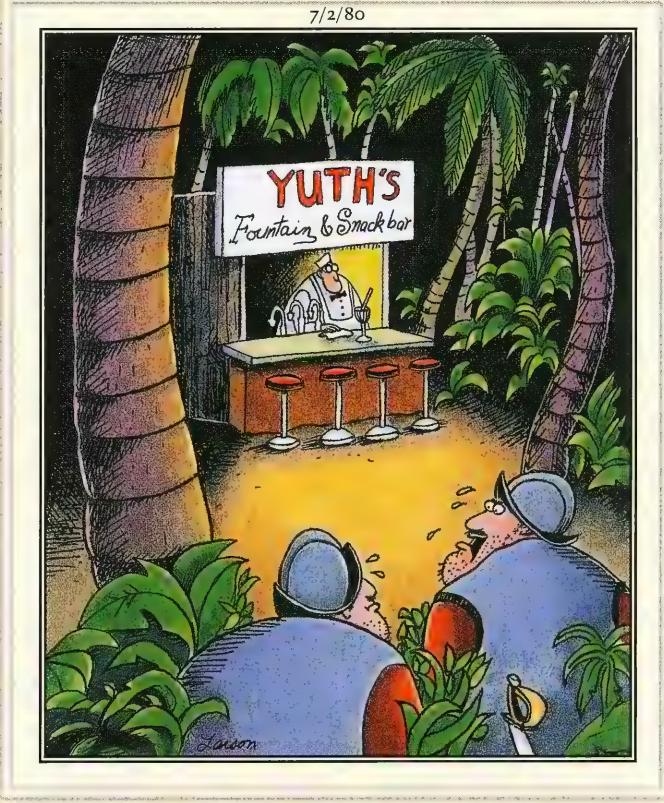


"The curse of every albatross—that ship's  
been following us for days!"

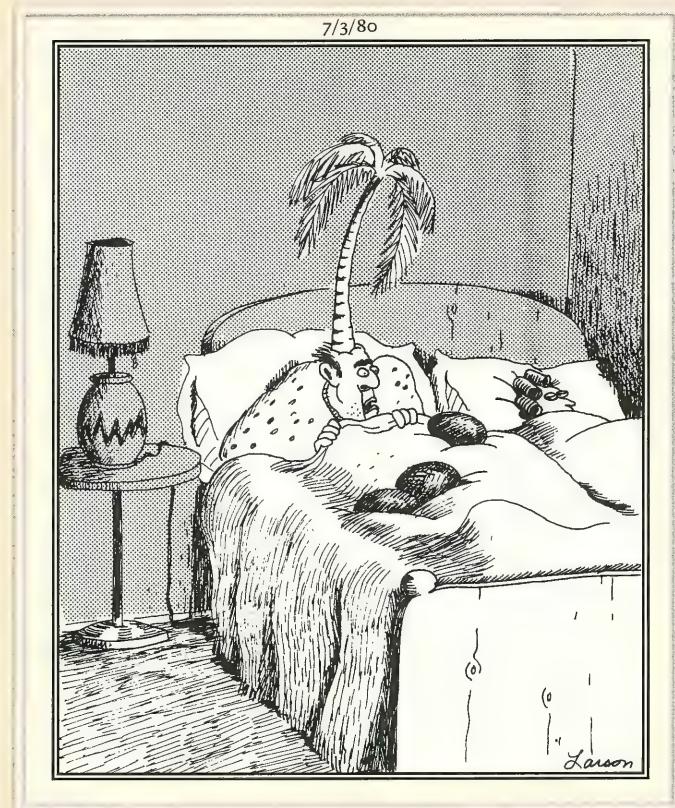
July 1980



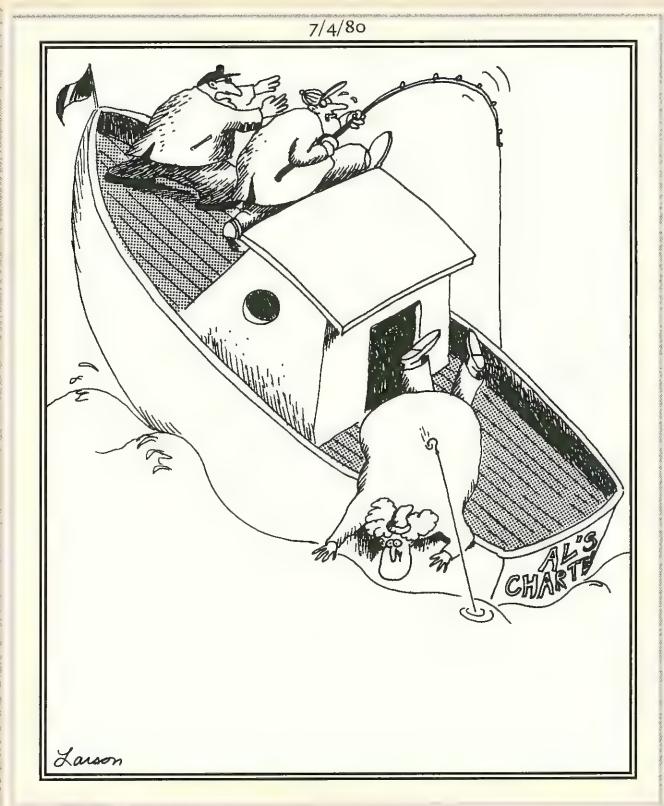
"Say, honey ... didn't I meet you last night at  
the feeding frenzy?"



"When we get back, I'm gonna wring  
de León's neck!"



"What the? ... Margaret! Margaret! Wake up! ...  
The bed's covered with coconuts!"

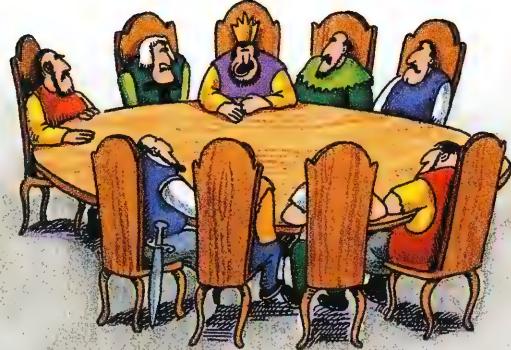


"Set the hook! Set the hook!"

July 1980

7/8/80

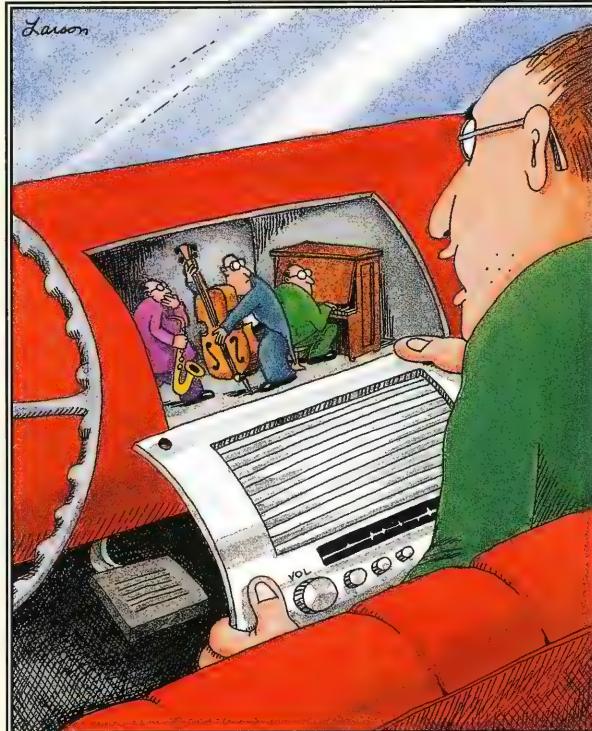
Larson



"And that goes for Lancelot, Galahad, and the rest of you guys—no more stickin' your gum under the table."

7/5/80

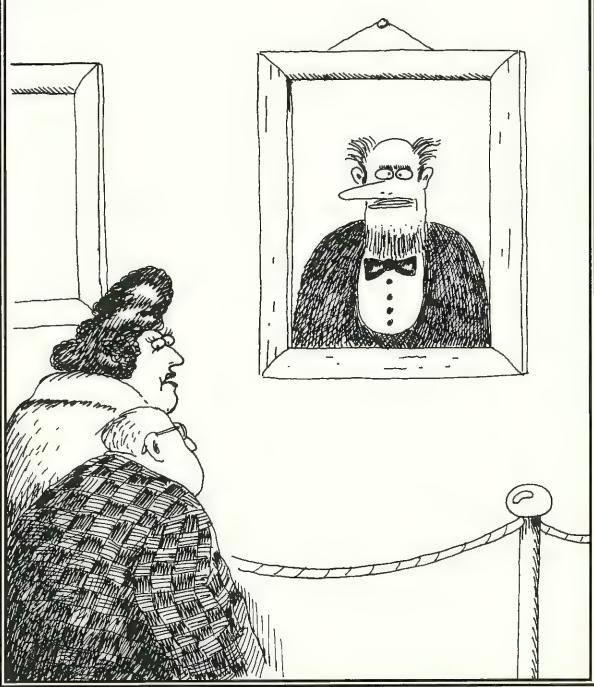
Larson



"Aha!"

7/7/80

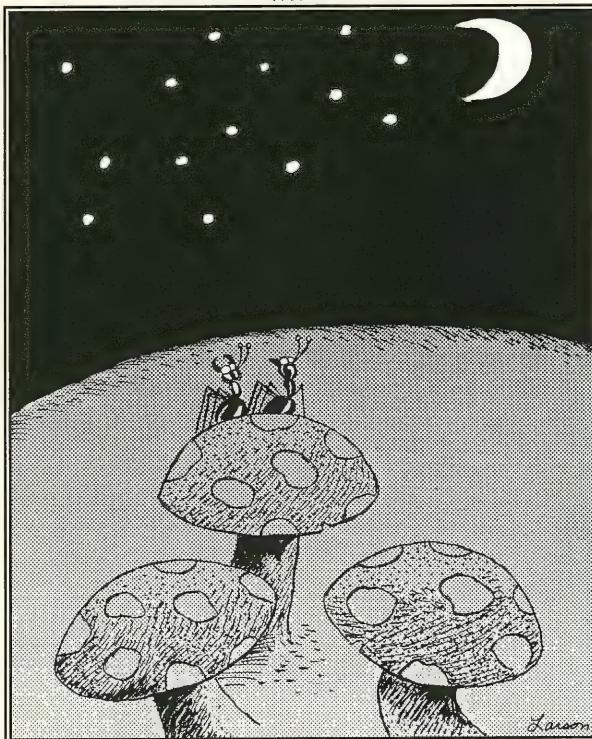
Larson



"Gad, that's eerie. ... No matter where you stand the nose seems to follow."

7/9/80

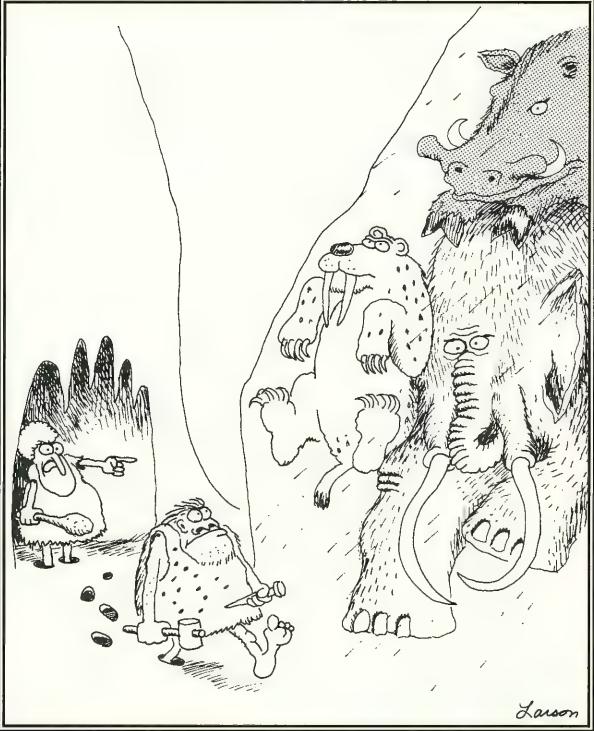
Larson



"Just look at those stars tonight. ... Makes you feel sort of small and insignificant."

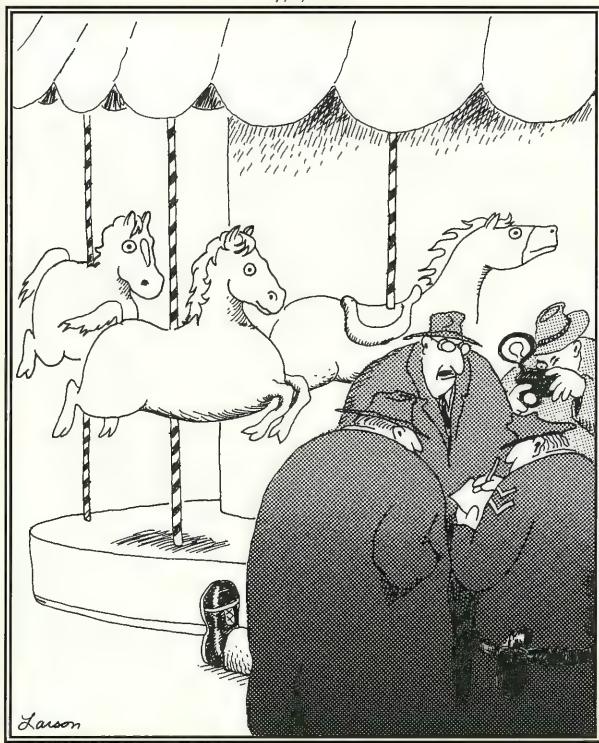
July 1980

7/10/80



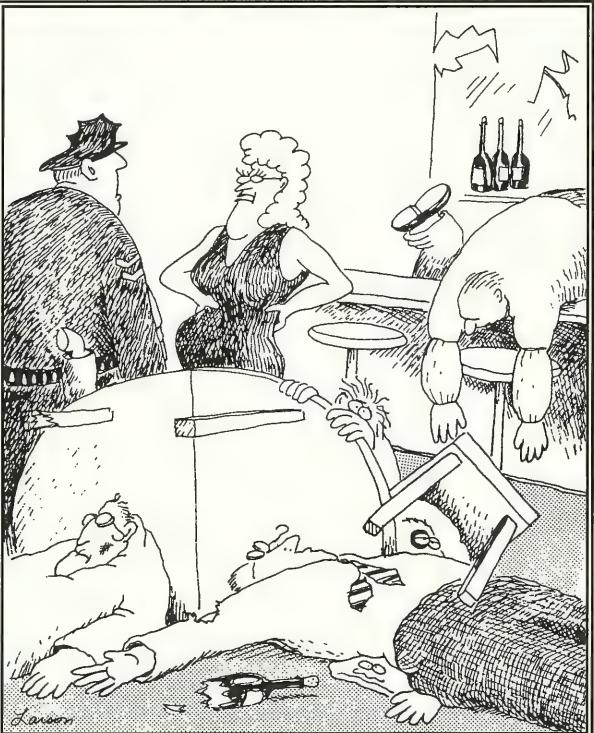
"And while you're out there, bring in a couple of them frozen dinners."

7/11/80



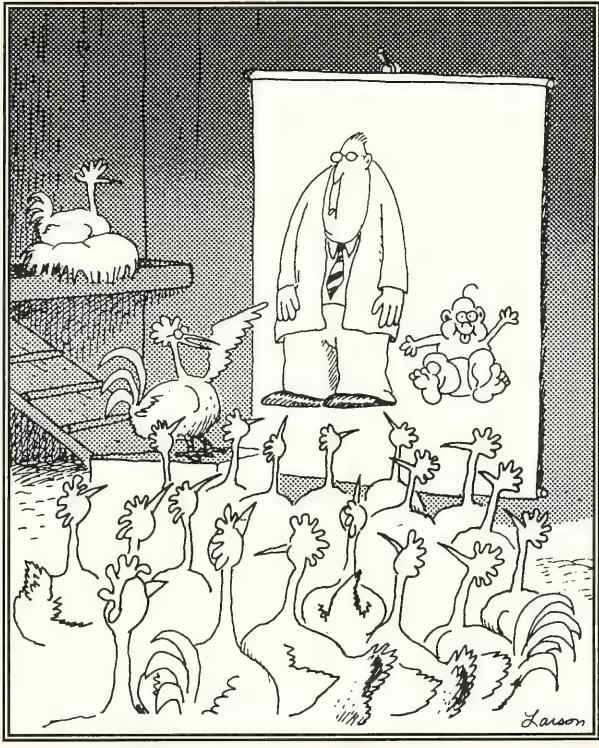
"It's the attendant ... he's been trampled."

7/14/80



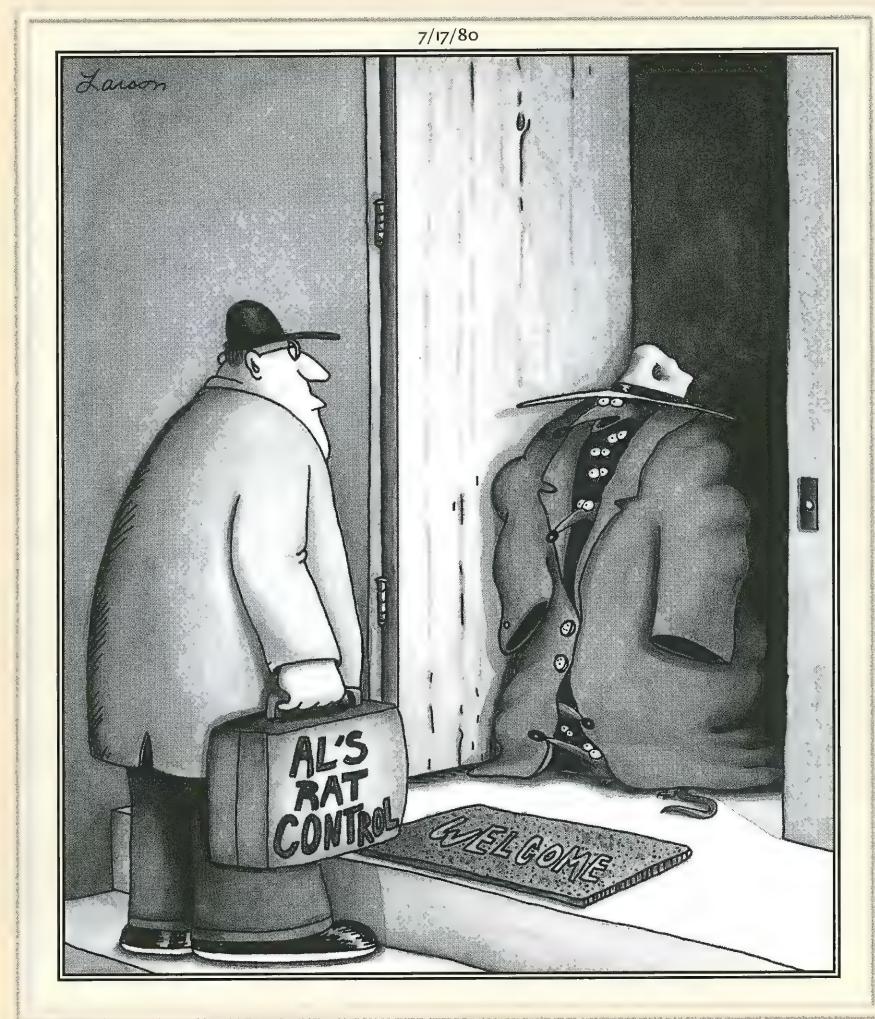
"So then this little sailor dude whips out this can of spinach, this crazy music starts playin', and ... well, just look at this place."

7/15/80

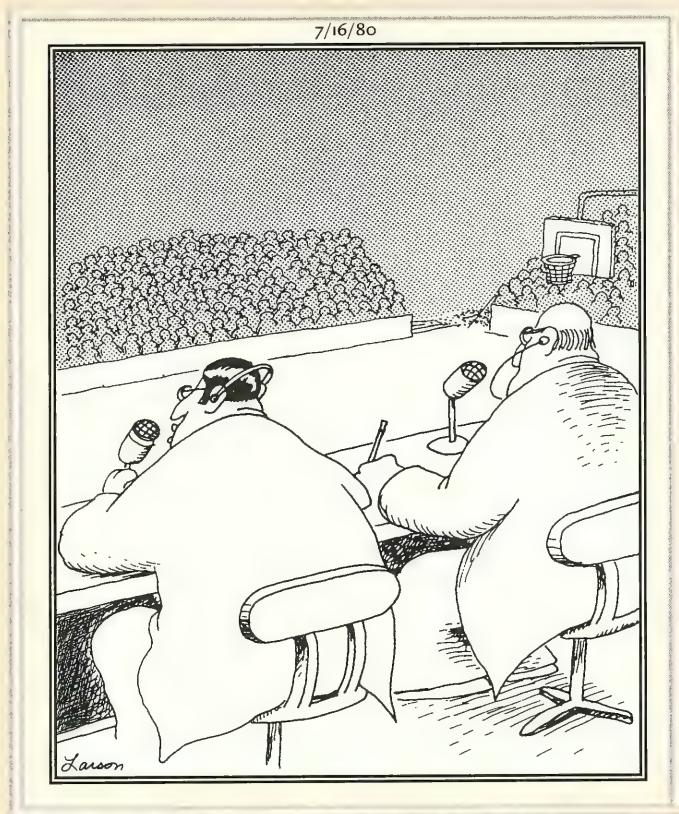
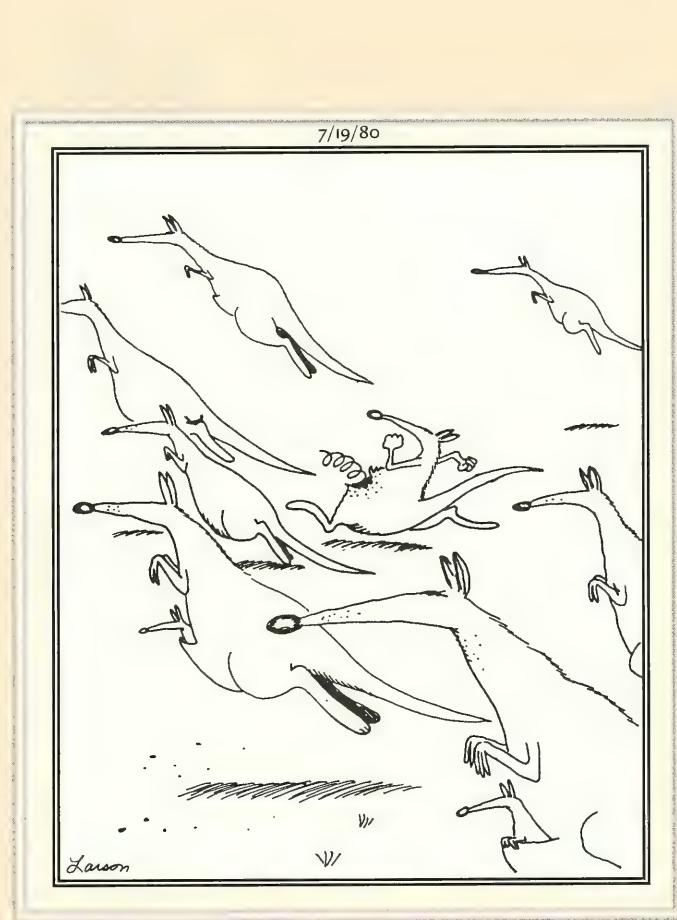


"Now here's one of the mysteries of the universe. ... Which came first?"

July 1980

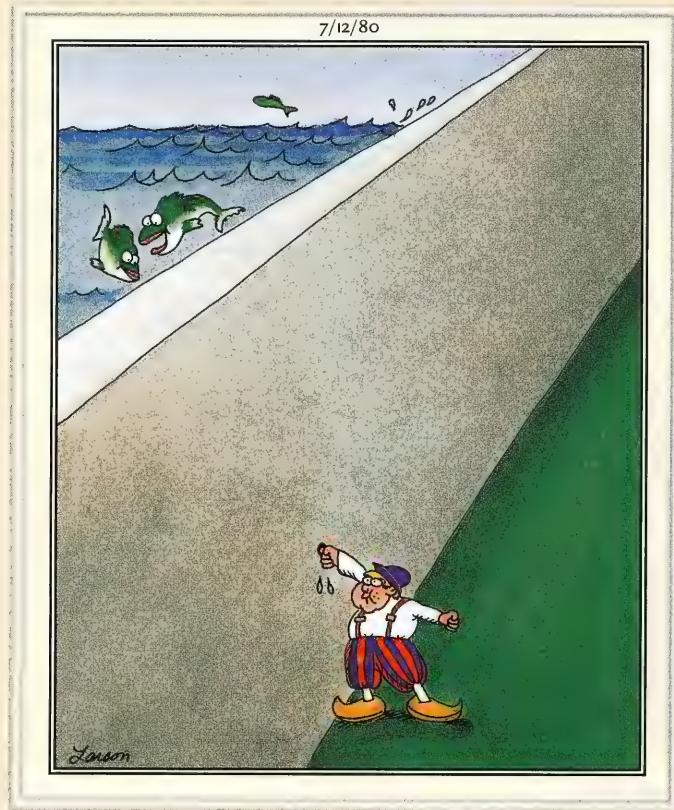


"I'm sorry, we did call an exterminator ...  
but we've changed our minds."

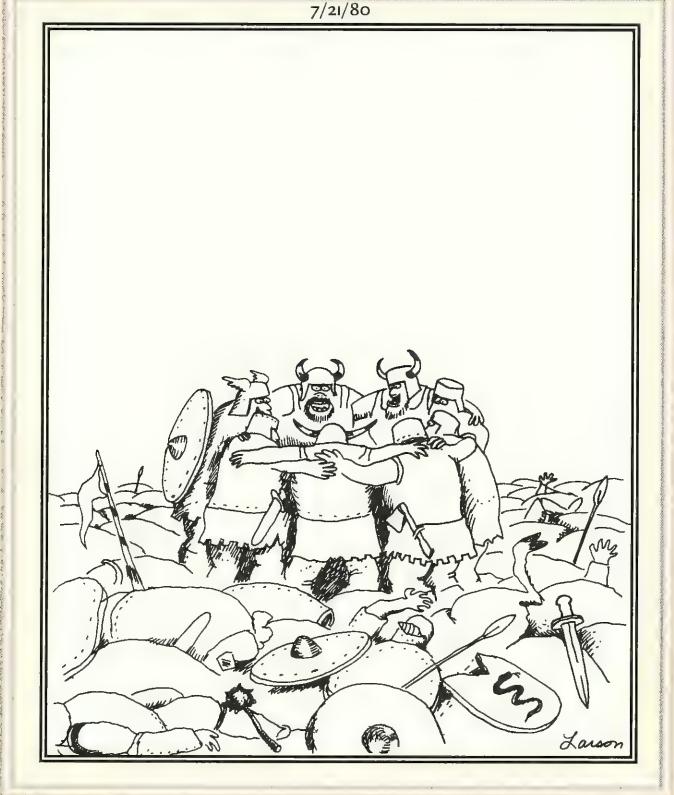
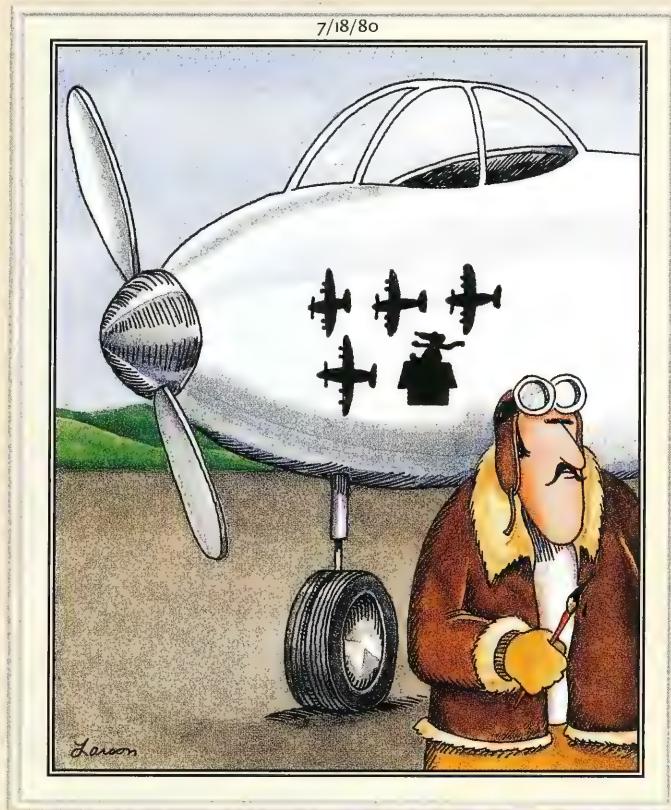


"Well, I guess that does it, folks. ... Number 26  
is taking his ball and going home."

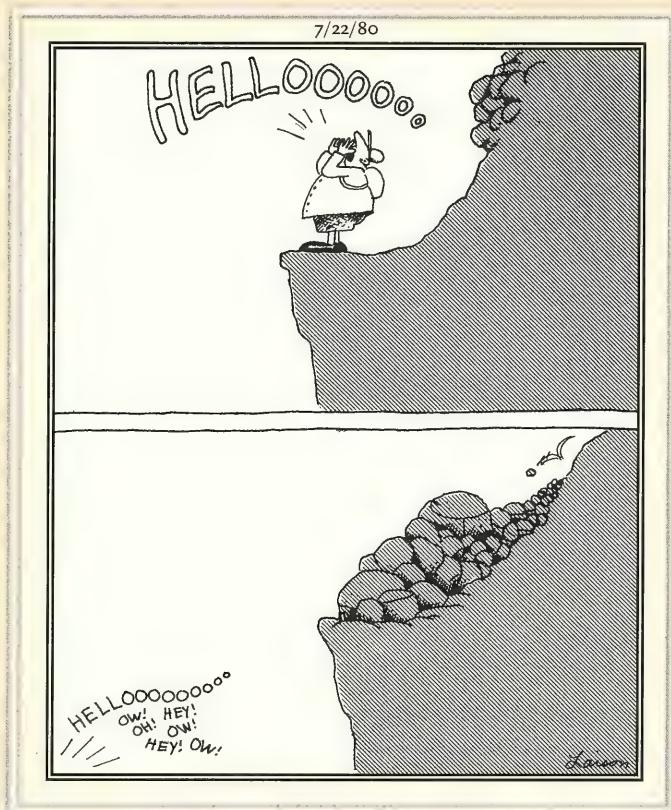
July 1980



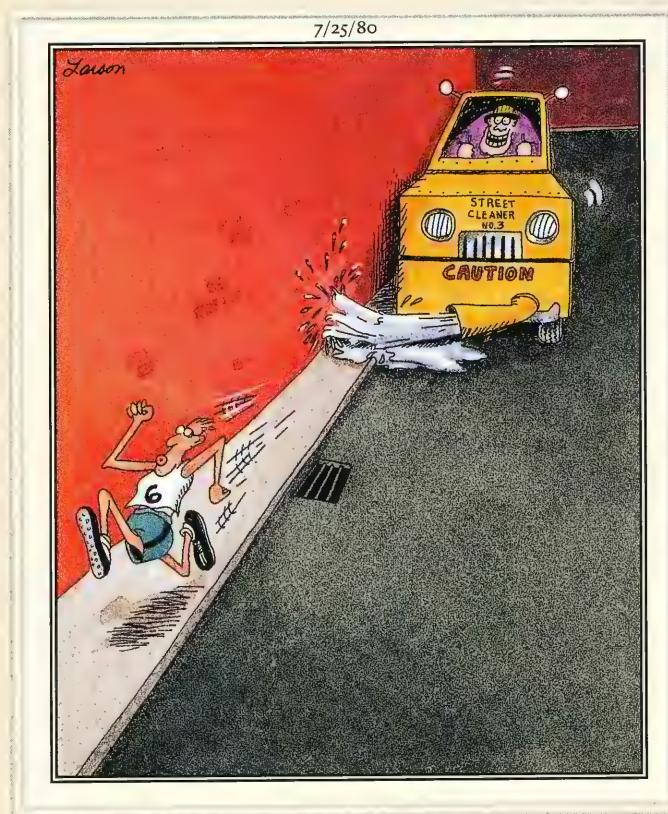
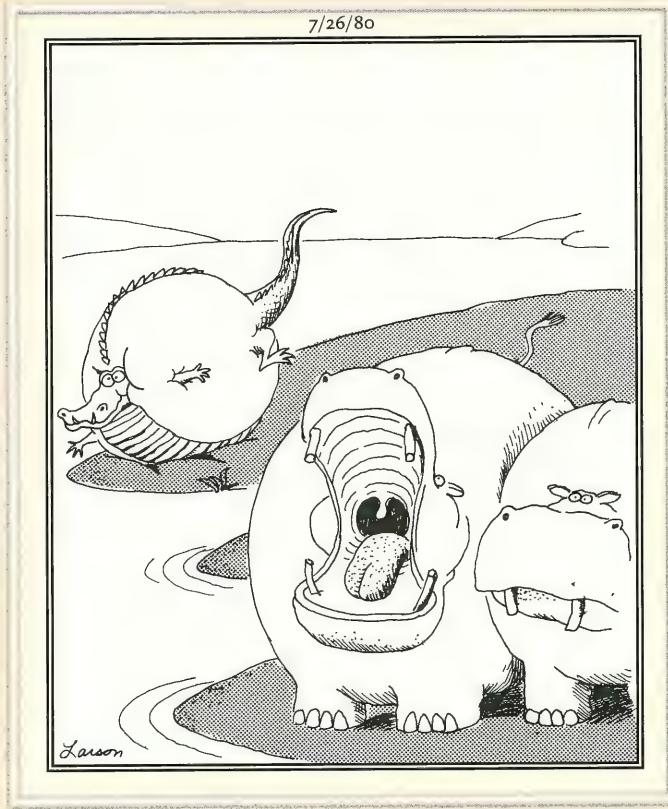
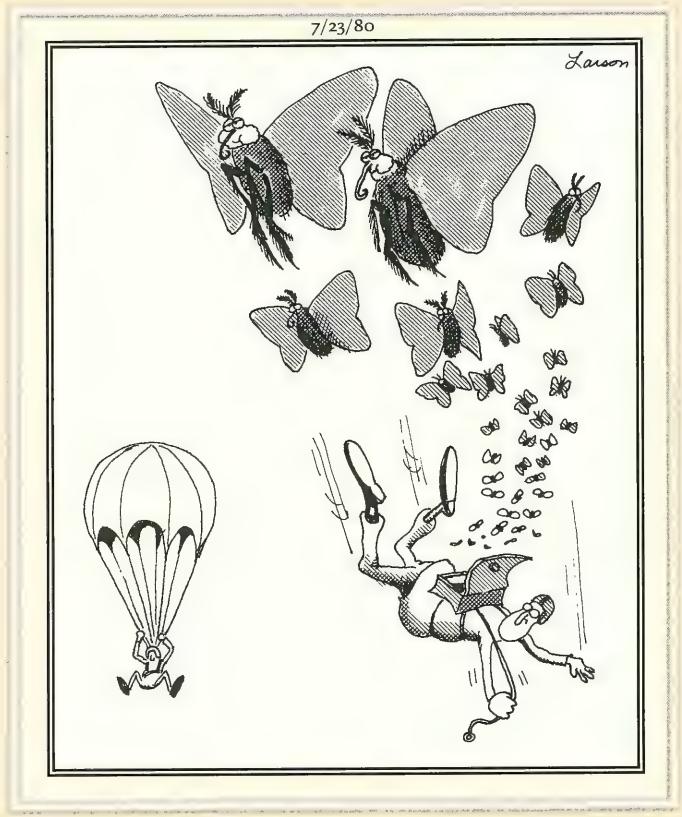
"Look! Down there! ... It's a worm!"



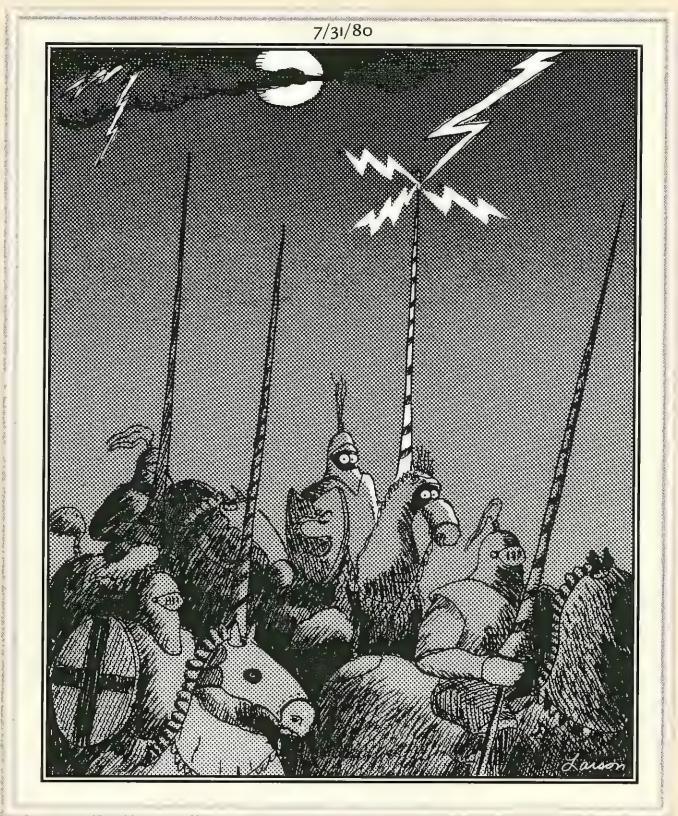
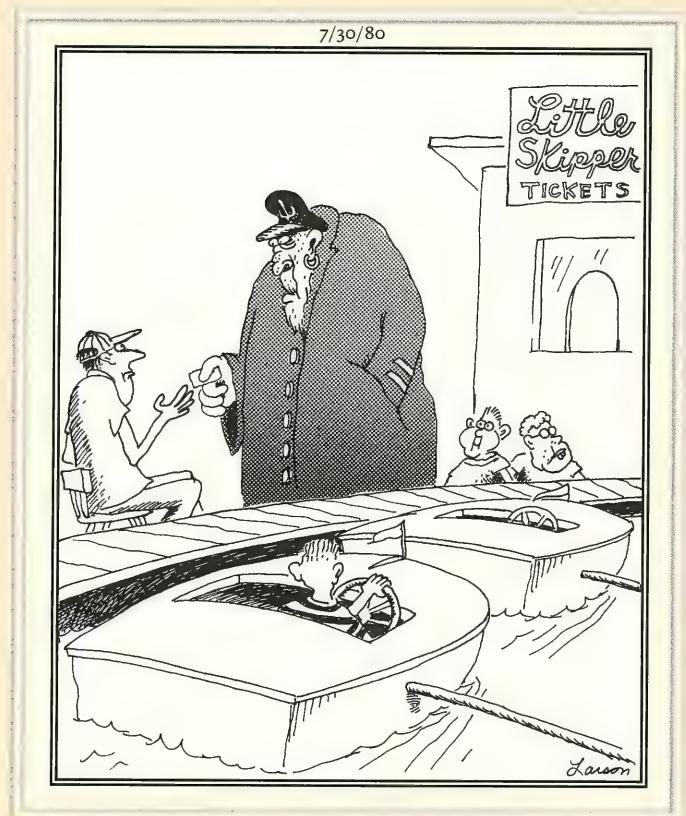
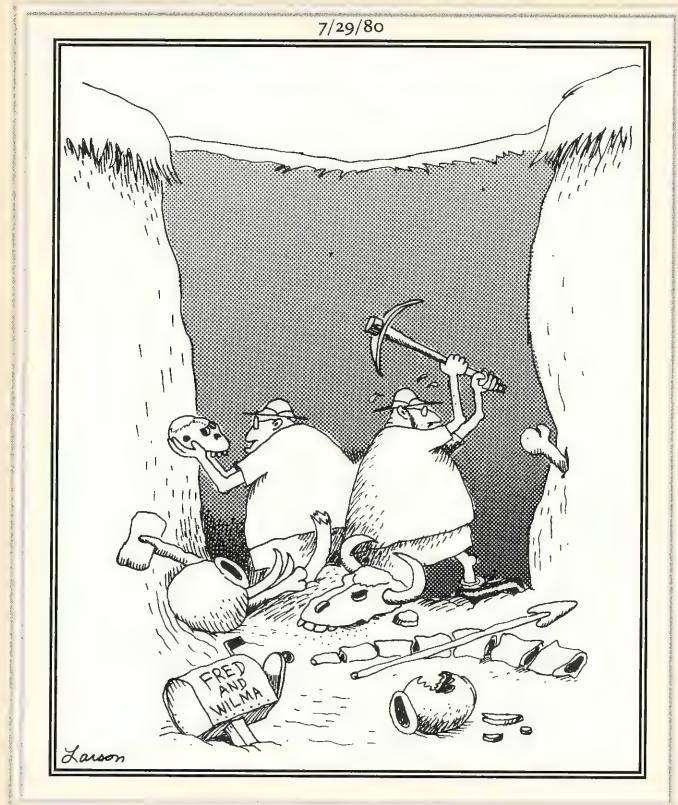
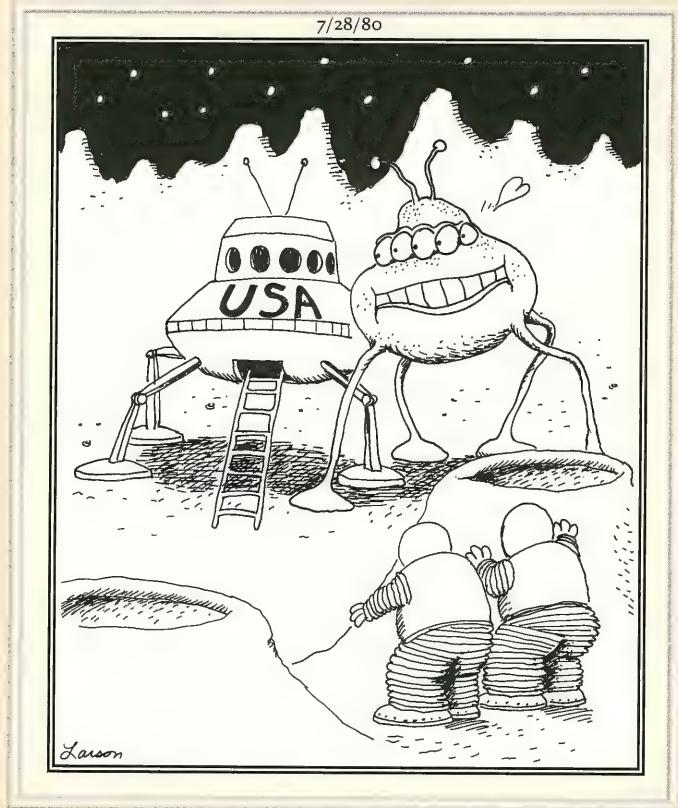
"Two, four, six, eight, who do we appreciate ..."



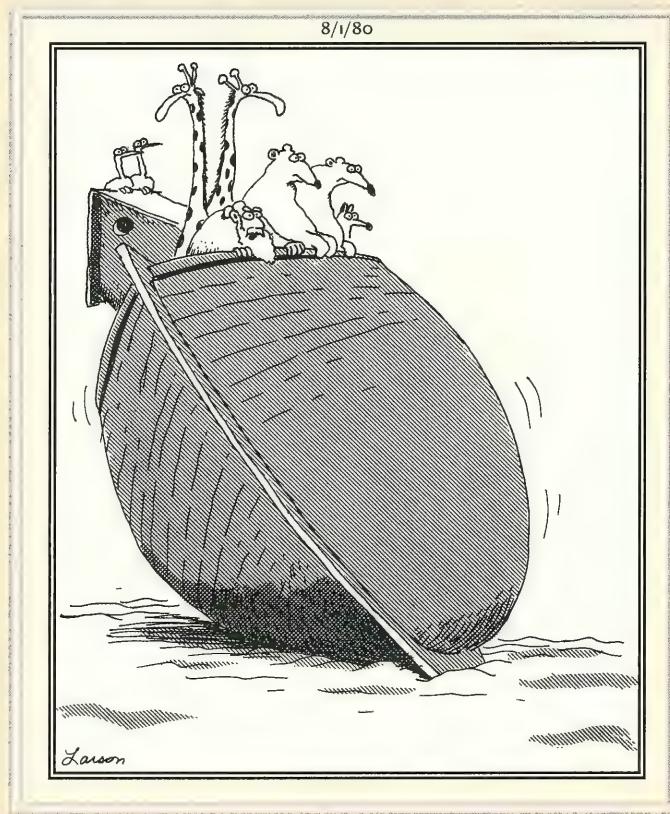
July 1980



July 1980



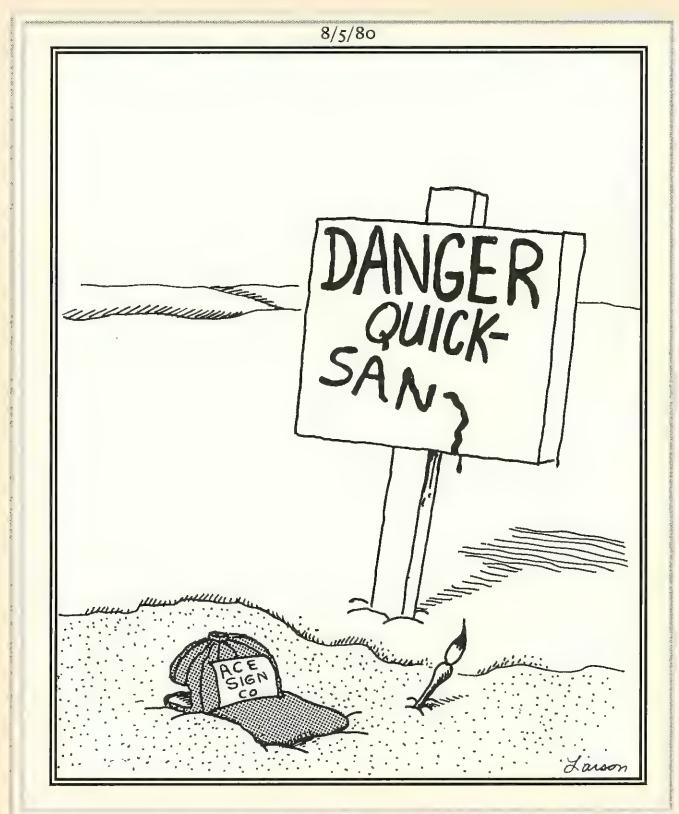
August 1980



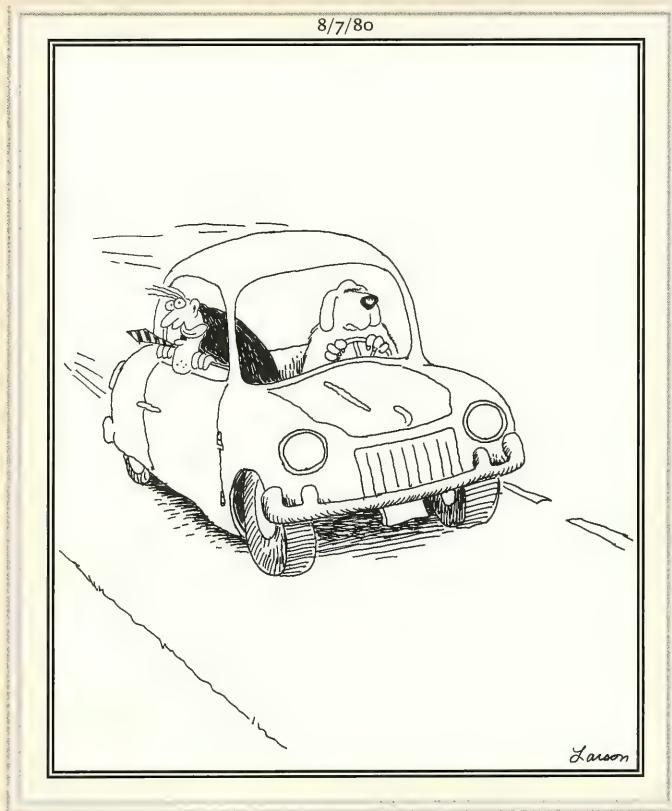
Larson



"Blast! ... The elephants are sick again!"

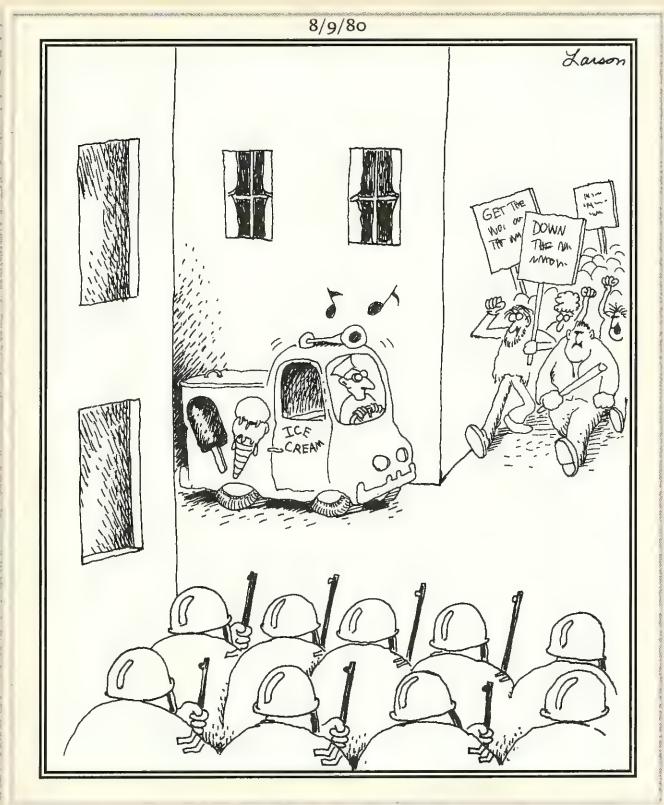
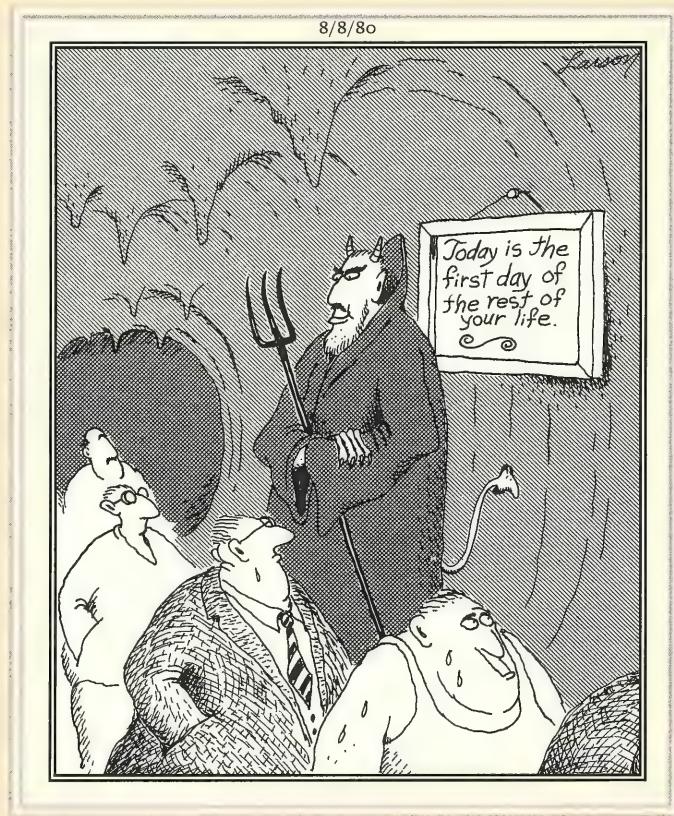
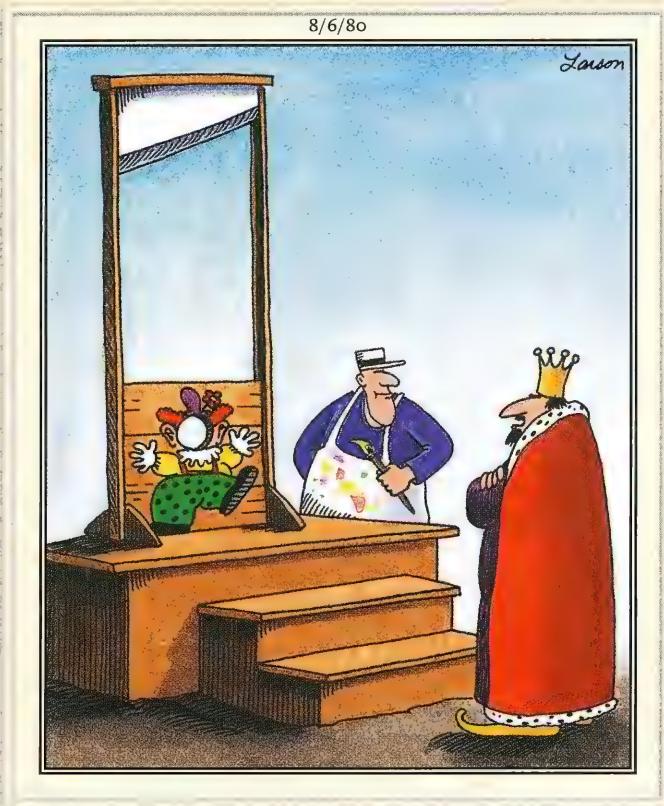


Larson



Larson

August 1980



August 1980

Dear Stan:

I wonder if we might gather some of the reactions I have had to Gary Larson--editors' comments--and weave them into a story of some kind for E&P (or even a note for general circulation--or both). The initial response to this cartoon has been quite funny and un-editor-like, if you think as I often do of newspaper editors as cautious and diplomatic people--judicious in their praise, given rarely to hyperbole or boundless laughter at the slightest occasion--above all, as having an immunity to outrage (a languor in the face of eccentricity) that borders on world-weariness!...And then, all of a sudden, with Gary Larson on their desk, what human sparks emerge! What has made this interesting to me is not knowing as I travel from one place to the next what kind of response to expect--the reactions are so diverse, unpredictable--even from editors I know fairly well. I don't know if I am going to be offered another cup of Sanka or shown the door. There is a lot of outright laughter incidentally a lot of silence too with intermittent nervous laughter--and then there is some deep groaning, a miserable sound to hear. Anyway, here are some of the comments:

"I hate it, it's sick."

"Oh dear, OH DEAR!"

"The best thing since Doonesbury as far as I am concerned. And they're all good!"

*Editor's note: This is a memo from Stuart Dodds to his boss, Stan Arnold, general manager of Chronicle Features Syndicate. Dodds, the sales manager for the syndicate, had the unenviable job of being the first person to try and sell The Far Side to newspaper editors (who tend to be a rather cynical lot). It was written late at night in a small motel room in the desert outside of Tucson on his portable typewriter.*

2--Larson

"What a mind this man has. He's brilliant!"

"He's insane."

"Jesus...Jesus Christ."

"It might go over in San Francisco..."

"This is not a Buffalo product" (Buffalo Evening News)

"I don't know what this is but it's not for us."

"This is an excellent feature you have."

"This is the strangest thing I have seen in my life."

"Funny as hell."

"We'd get too much flack. I'd like to watch it for a while."

"Who is this guy?"

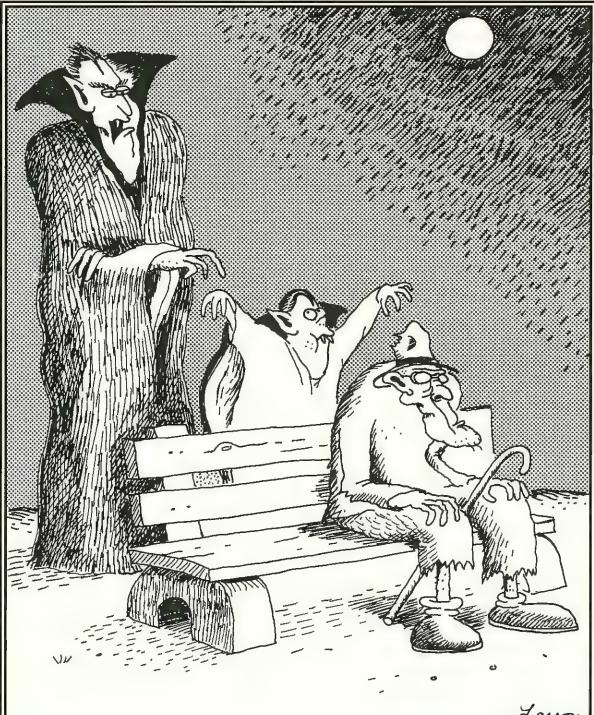
(There could follow a humorous biography of Larson.)

Editors by their nature are drawn towards controversy. If we can cast it about that this is a controversial feature, that it has brought on the highest praise from some quarters and made others hair stand on end, we'd build up curiosity--the inquiries would flow in and a percentage of them would buy it. Maybe we could send parts of this memo to E&P as "Notes From the Field" or some such thing, with one or two of the more horrifying cartoons... Those are my fevered thoughts in the desert tonight...

8/2/80--Tucson

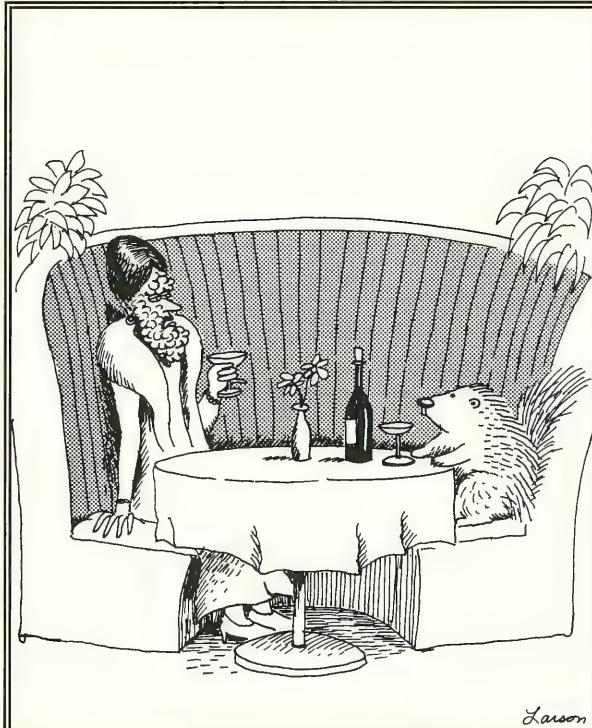
August 1980

8/11/80



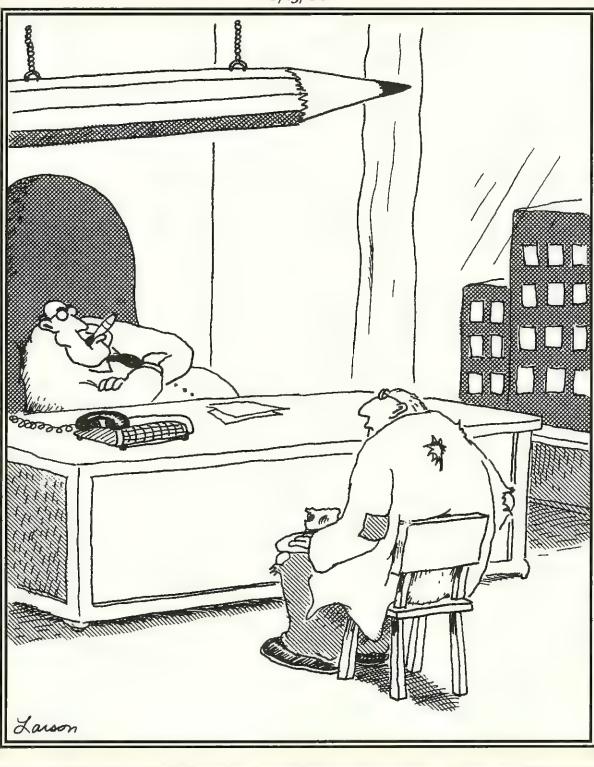
"No, no, Wendell ... you can't get blood  
out of a turnip."

8/12/80



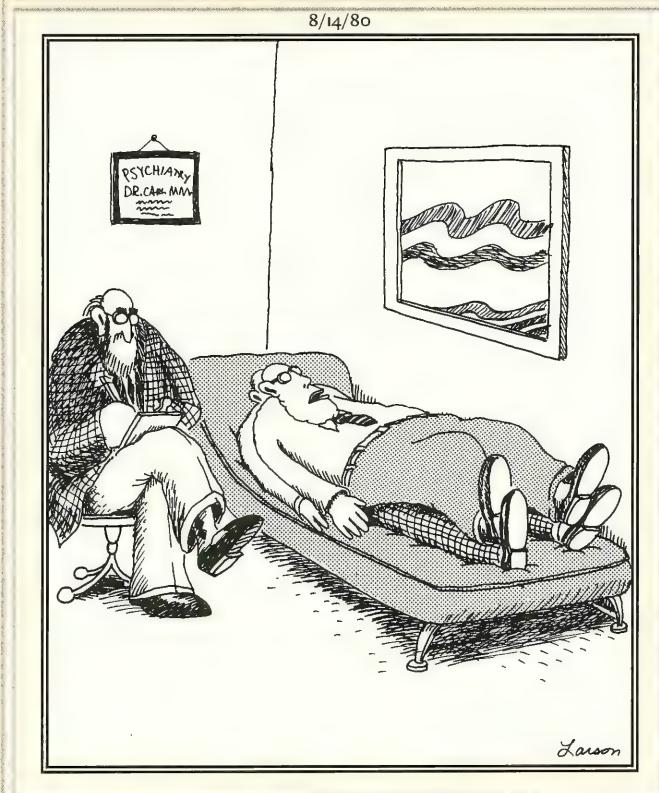
"Look. I just don't feel the relationship  
is working out."

8/13/80



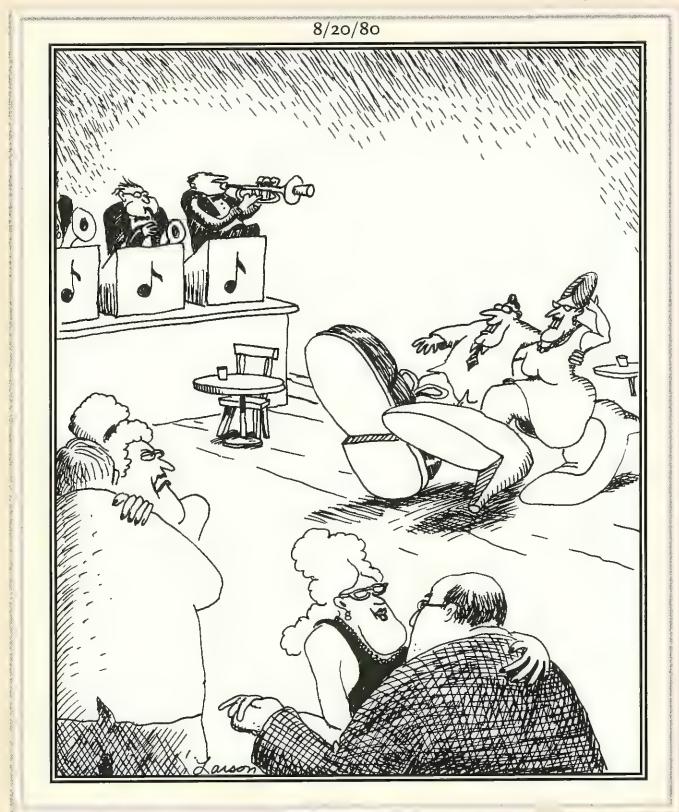
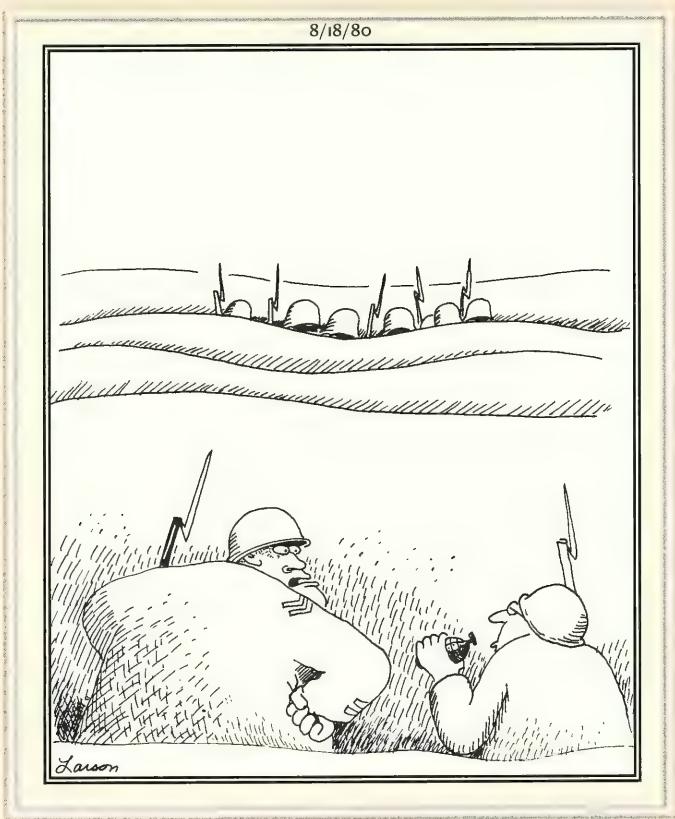
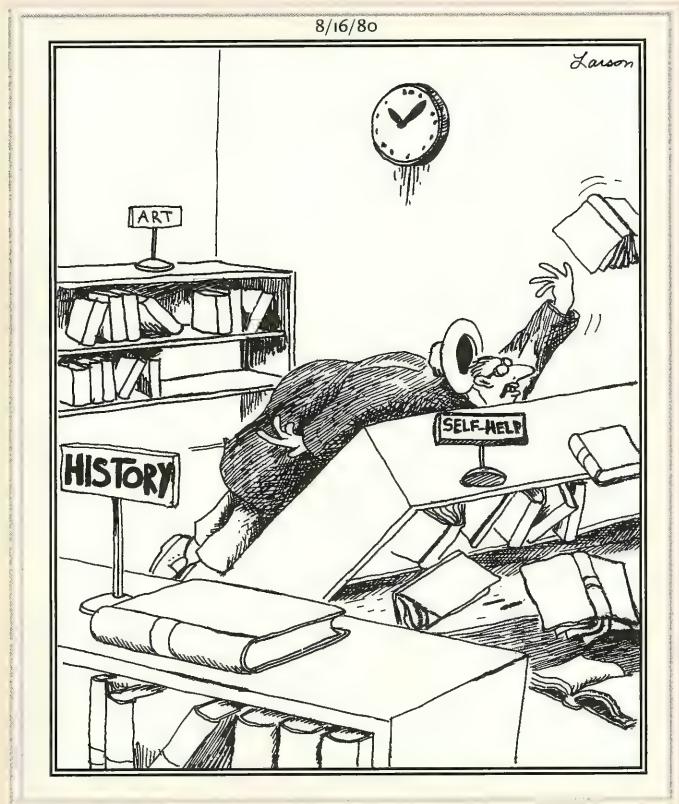
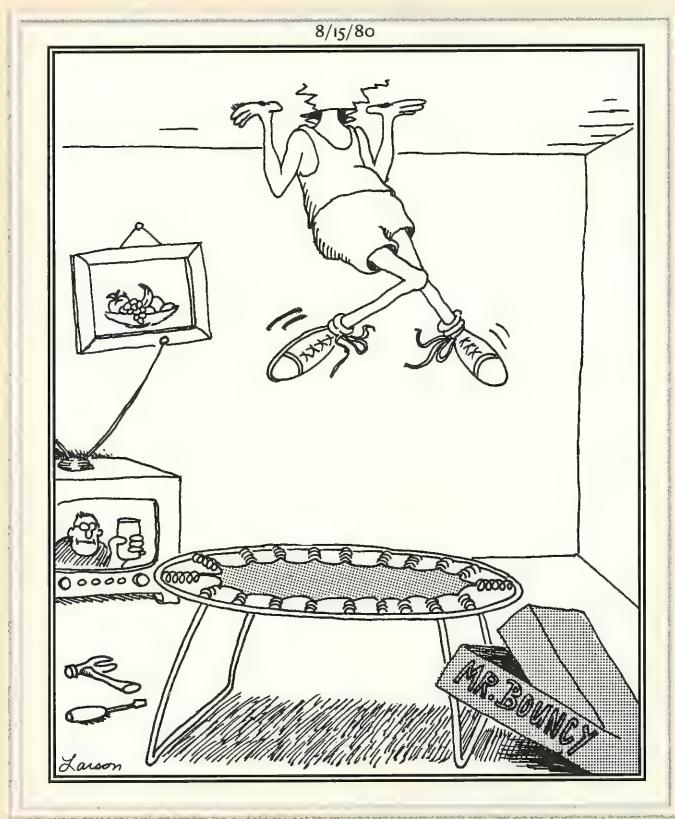
"So ... you wanna sell our pencils, do you?"

8/14/80



"It's quite strange ... almost like  
I'm being followed."

August 1980



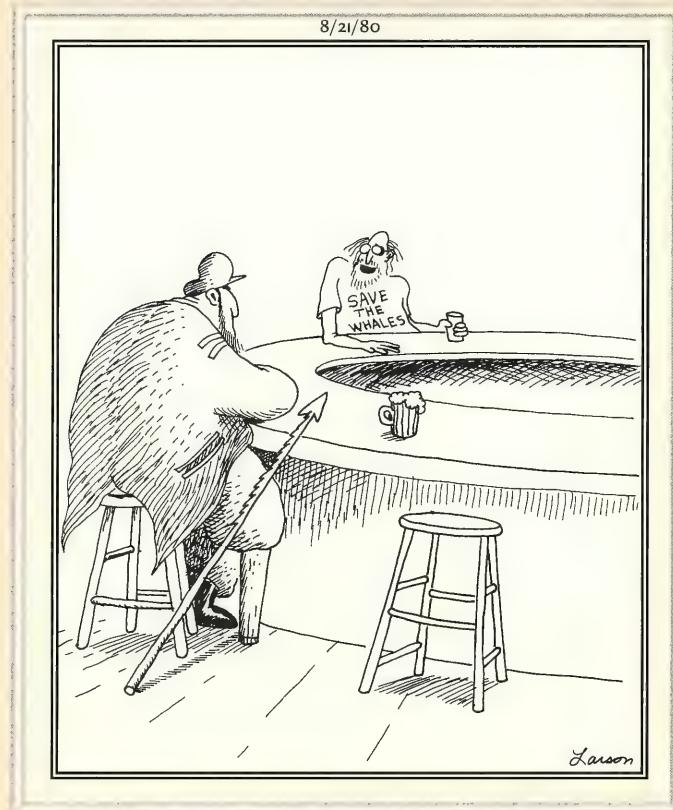
"Gad! Clear the dance floor—here come the Nelsons again."

"This time, Johnson, just pull the pin, throw the grenade, and refrain from yelling 'Heads!'"

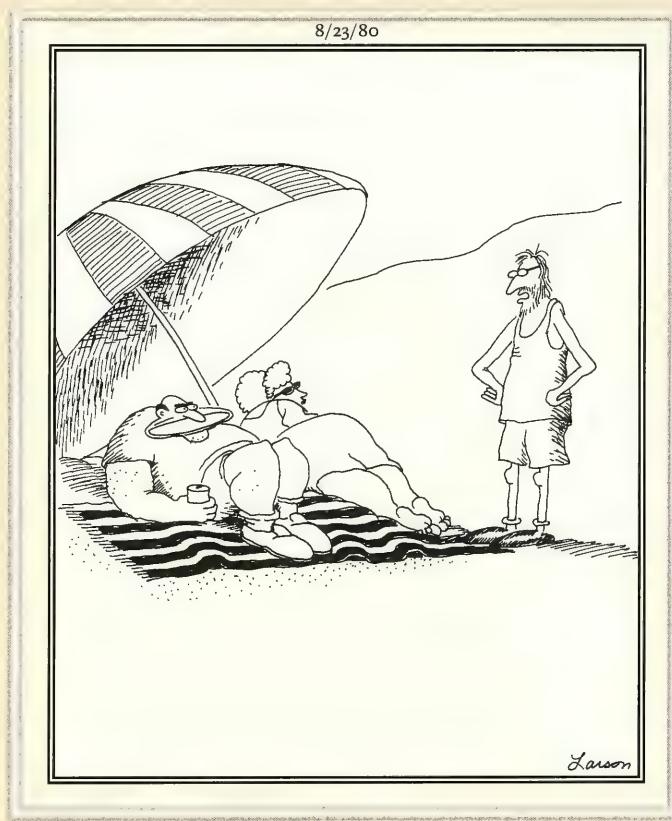
August 1980



"Well, I'm just starting to worry about that roast  
in the oven, that's all."



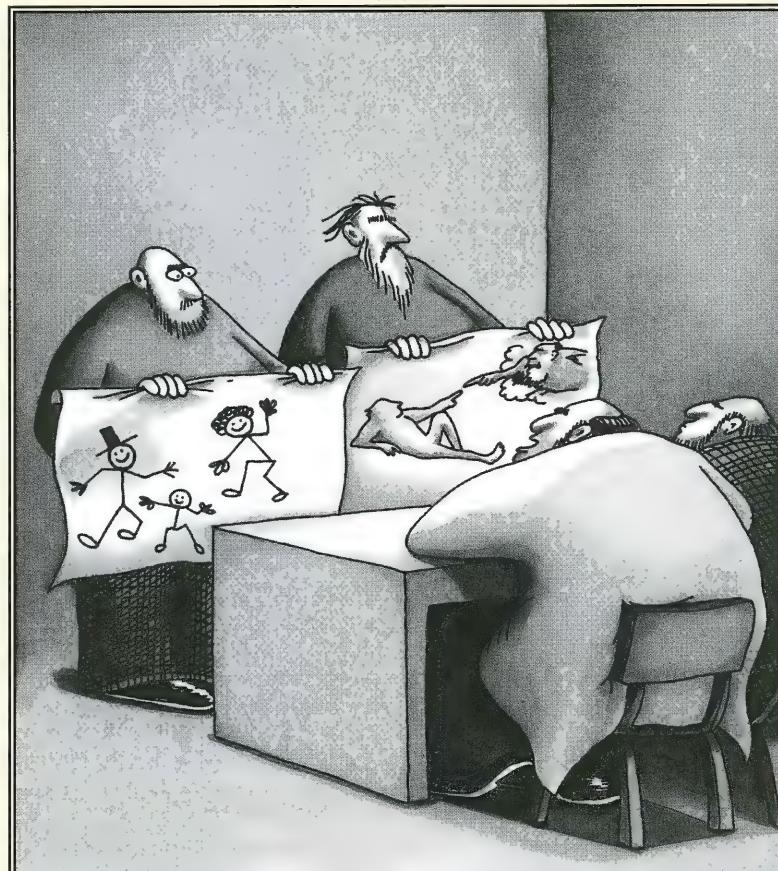
"Oh, sure—white whales. ...  
We've got plenty of them."



"Excuse me, but I believe that's my Frisbee."

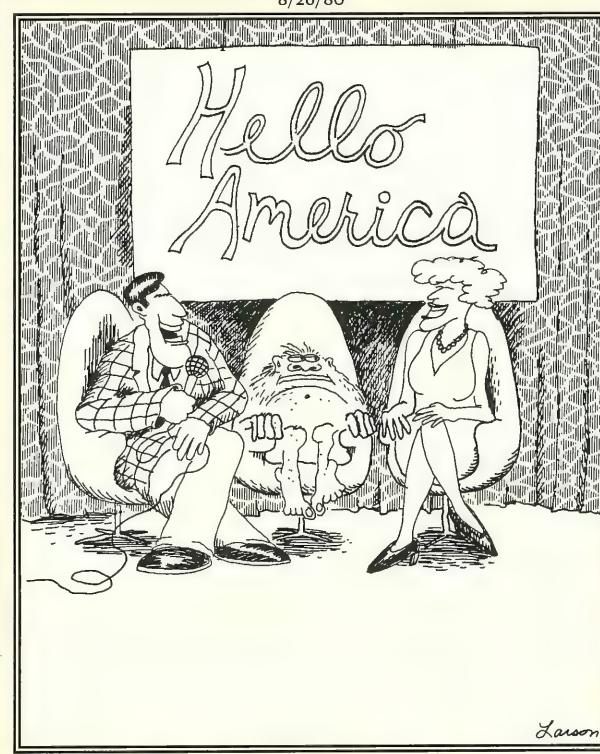
August 1980

8/22/80



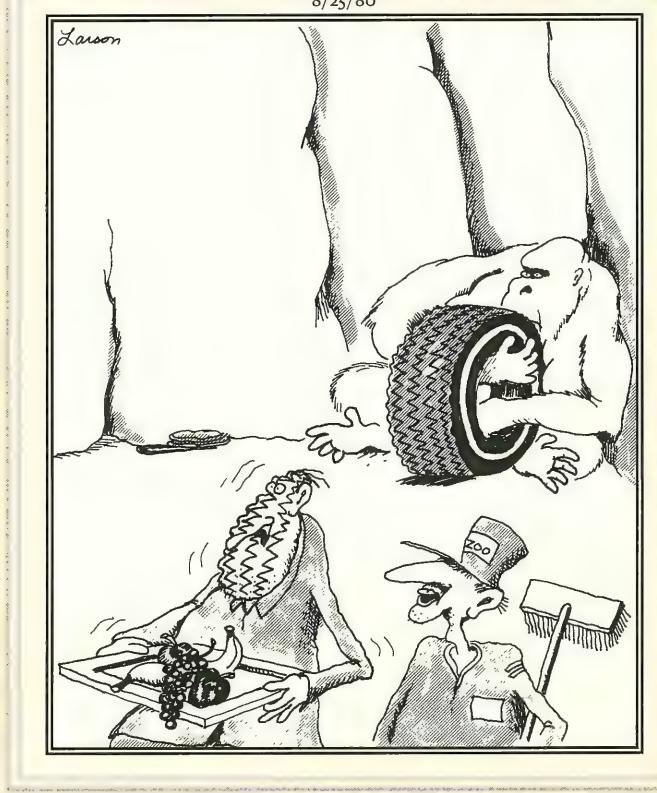
"I'm sorry, Mr. Funucci, but we've decided to award  
the ceiling project to Michelangelo."

8/26/80



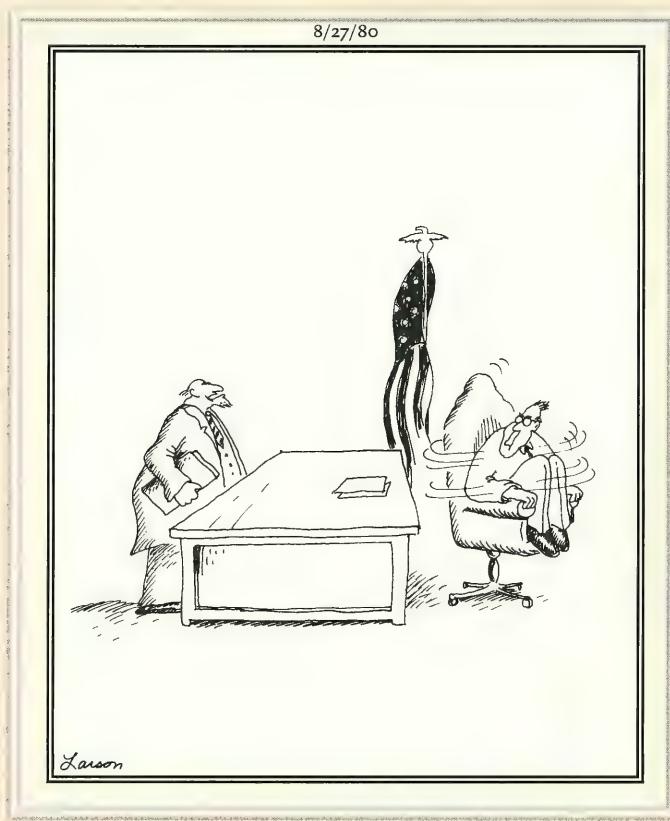
"And so, after being frozen in ice for almost  
50,000 years, we'll ask our friend here  
what dramatic changes he's noticed."

8/25/80

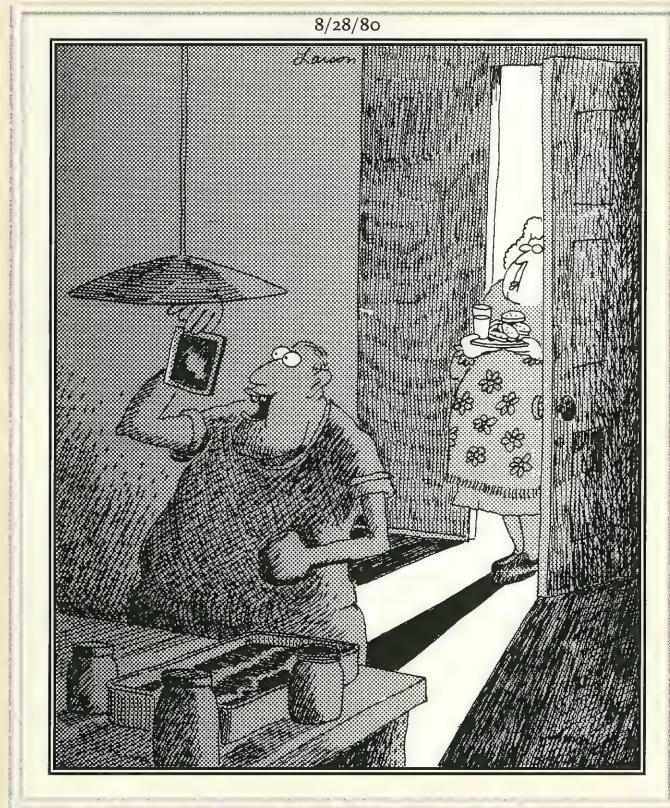


"Quick, powerful, and totally unpredictable—  
that's our Bobo."

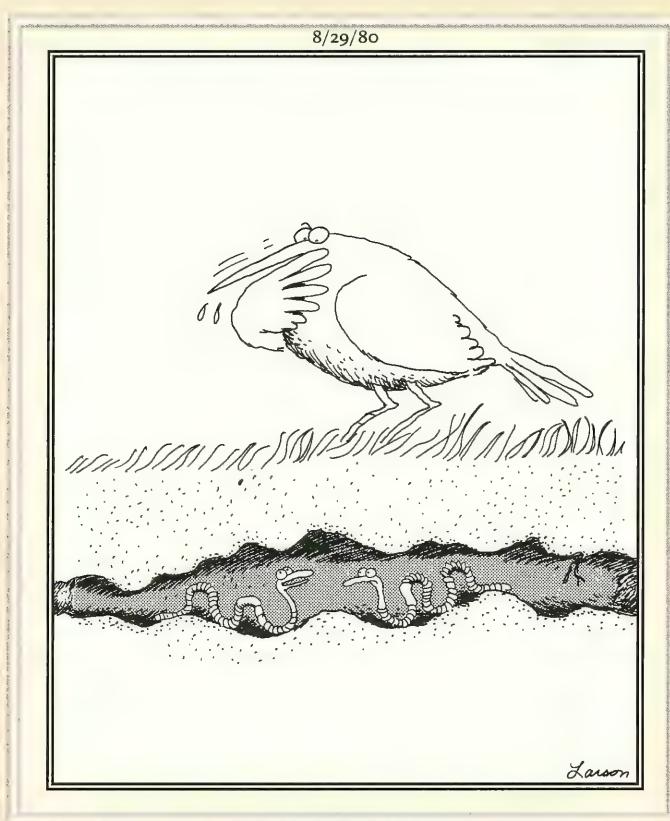
August 1980



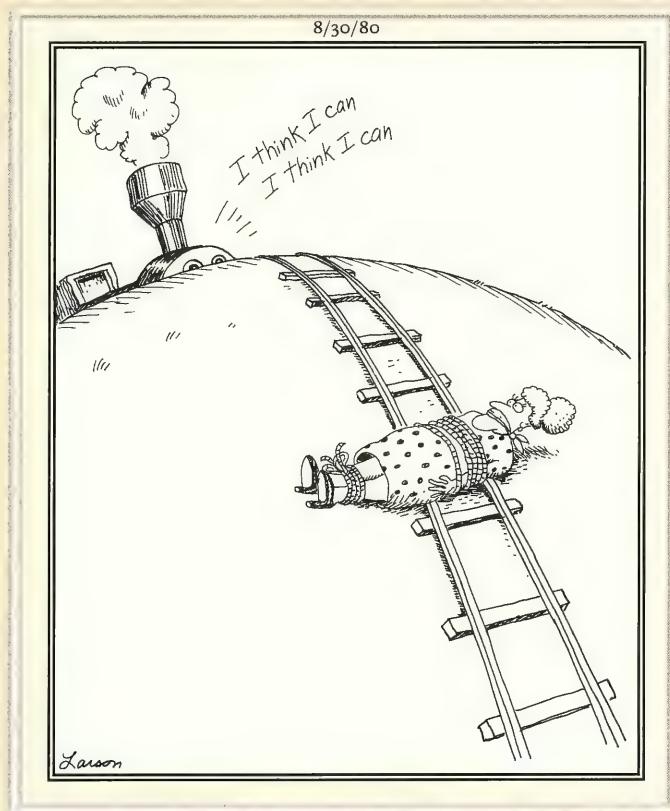
"I'm afraid you'll have to do better than that, sir. ... The former president could spin twenty-six times before stopping."



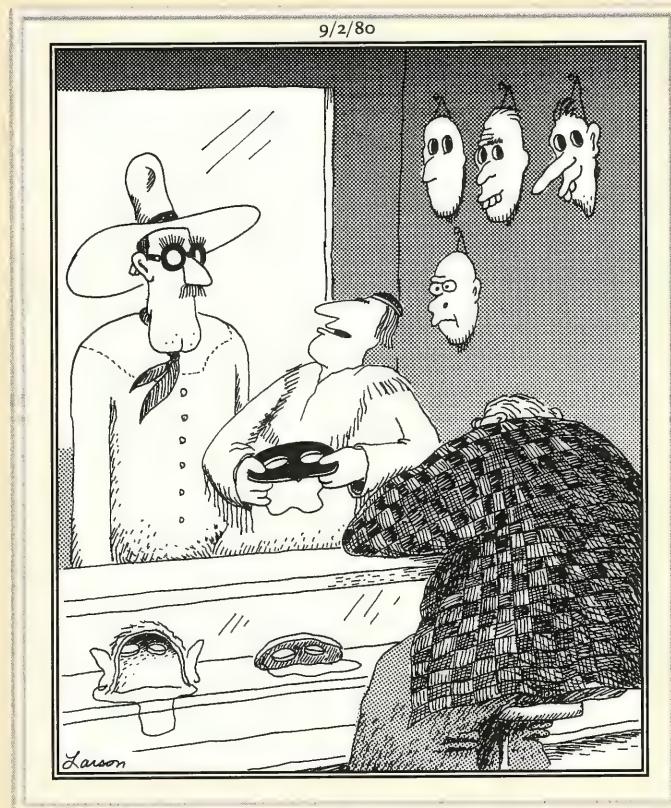
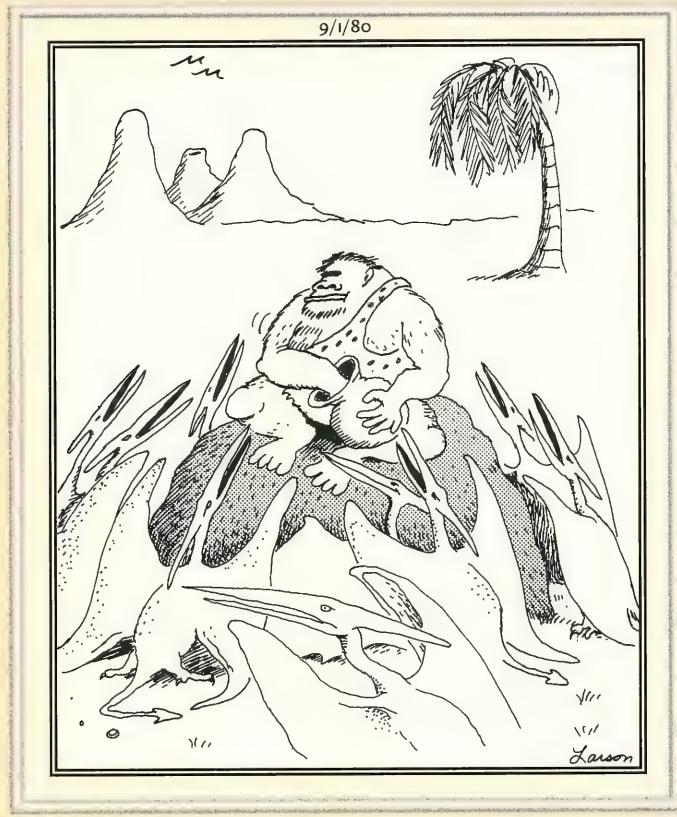
"I've done it! The first real evidence of a UFO! ... And with my own camera, in my own darkroom, and in my own ..."



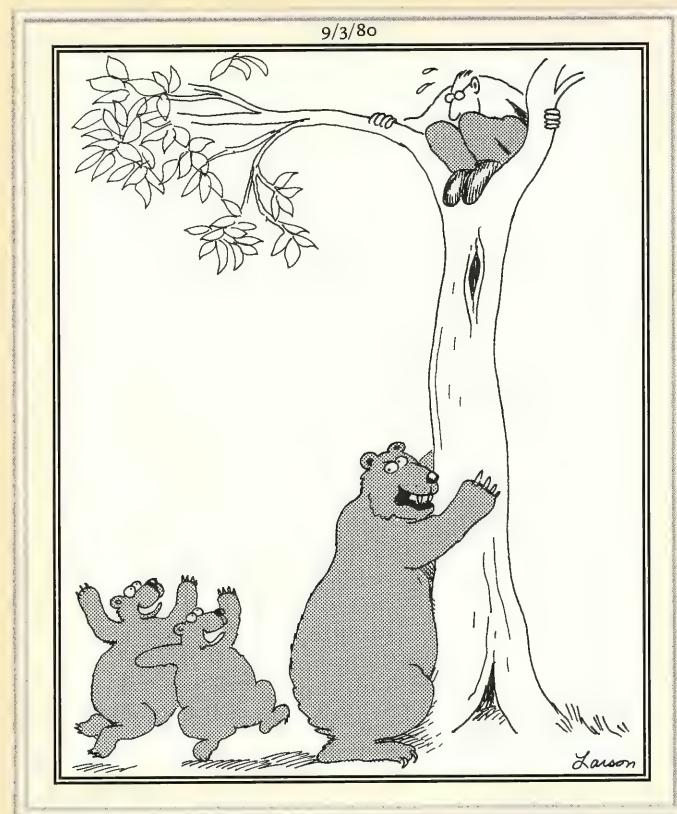
"Gesundheit!"



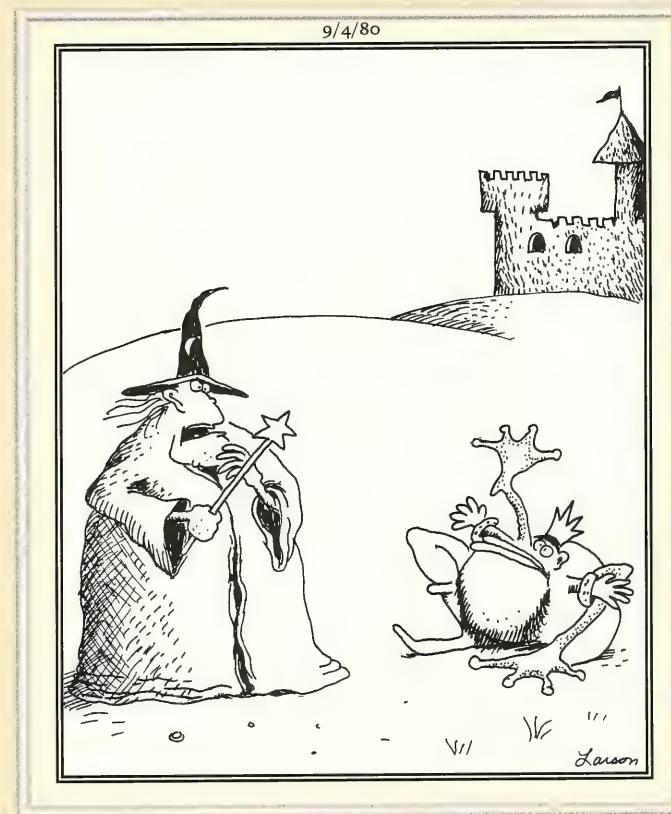
September 1980



"Hmmm ... not bad, Kemosabe ... but  
this one little better maybe."



"Okay, okay, settle down! ... Now who wants  
dark meat and who wants white?"



"Gad ... I gotta get this thing in for a tune-up."

September 1980

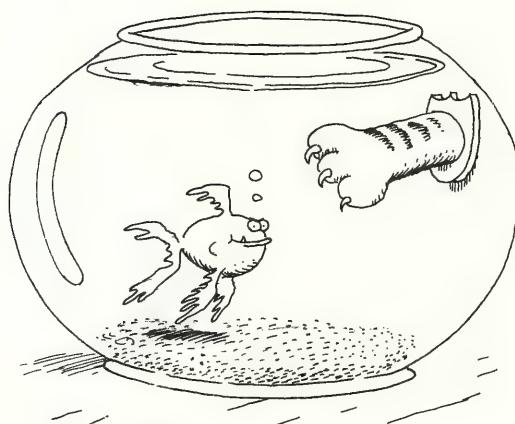
9/5/80



Larson

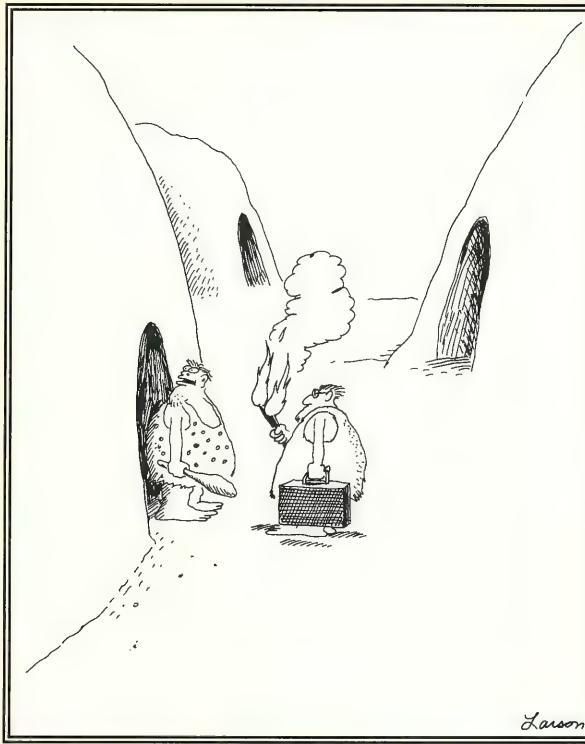
"God, Harriet ... check out  
the run in his nylon."

9/6/80



Larson

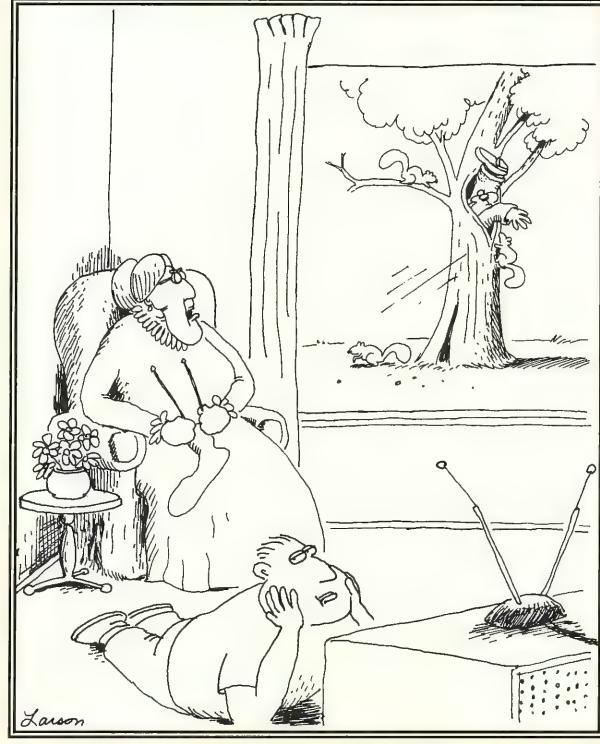
9/8/80



Larson

"Hey, Oona! Did you order  
some of this stuff?"

9/9/80



"Andrew, go out and get your grandfather. ...  
The squirrels have got him again."

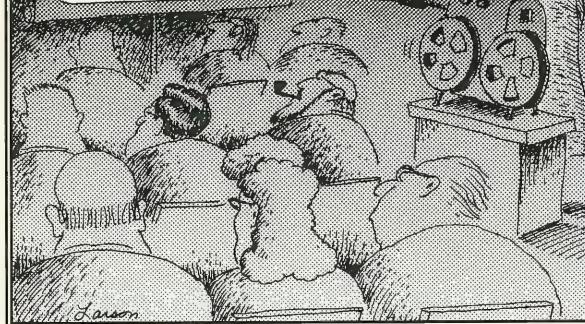
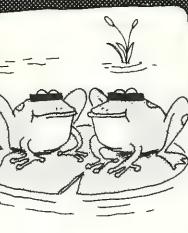
9/10/80

Larson



"For twelve perfect years I was a car-chaser. Pontiacs, Fords, Chryslers—I took 'em all on ... and yesterday my stupid owner backs over me in the driveway."

9/11/80



"And now, as you will observe, the male *Bufo boreas* begins his courtship display as the female responds to the vocal stimulus."

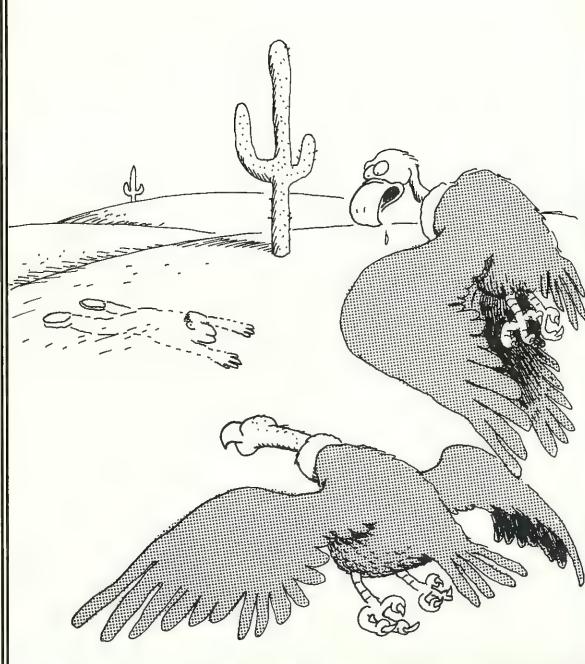
9/12/80



"Looks like some drifter comin' into town."

9/13/80

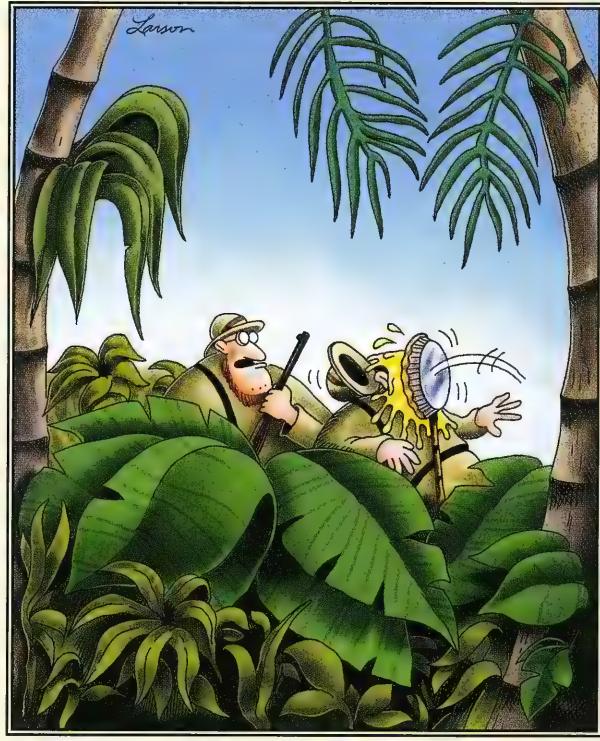
Larson



"You moron! ... I told you it was only a mirage!"

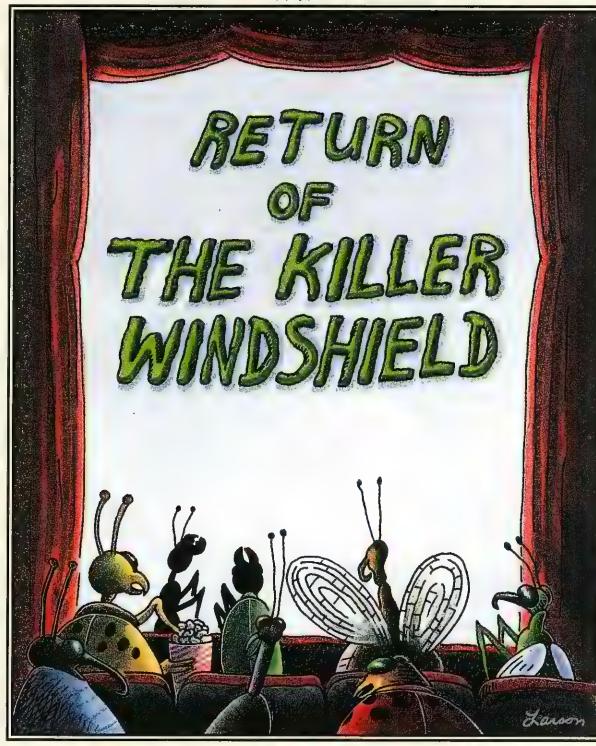
September 1980

9/16/80

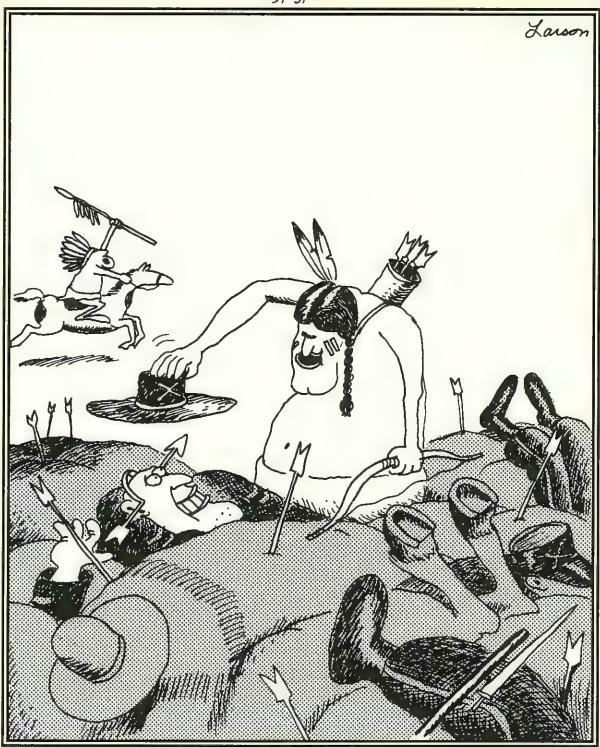


"Pie trap! ... We're in Zubutu country,  
all right."

9/17/80

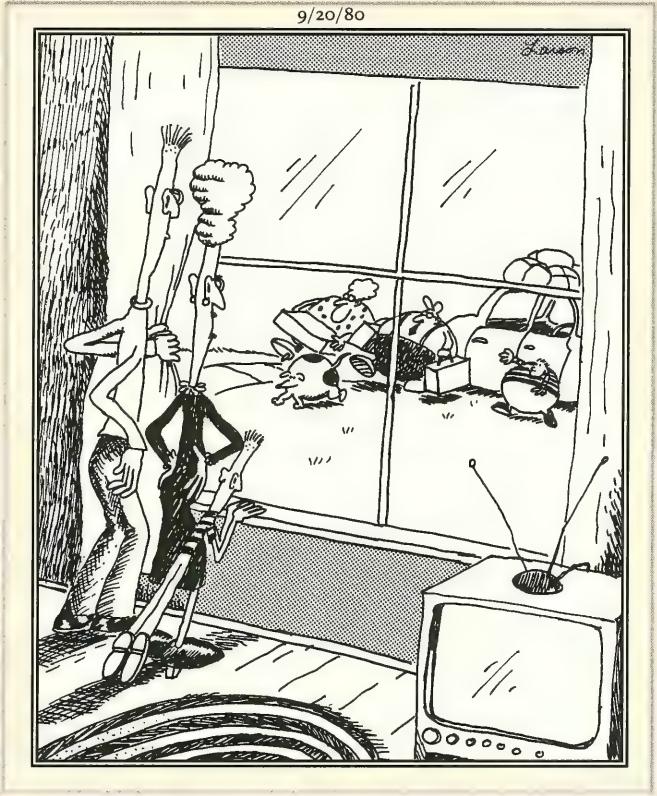


9/15/80

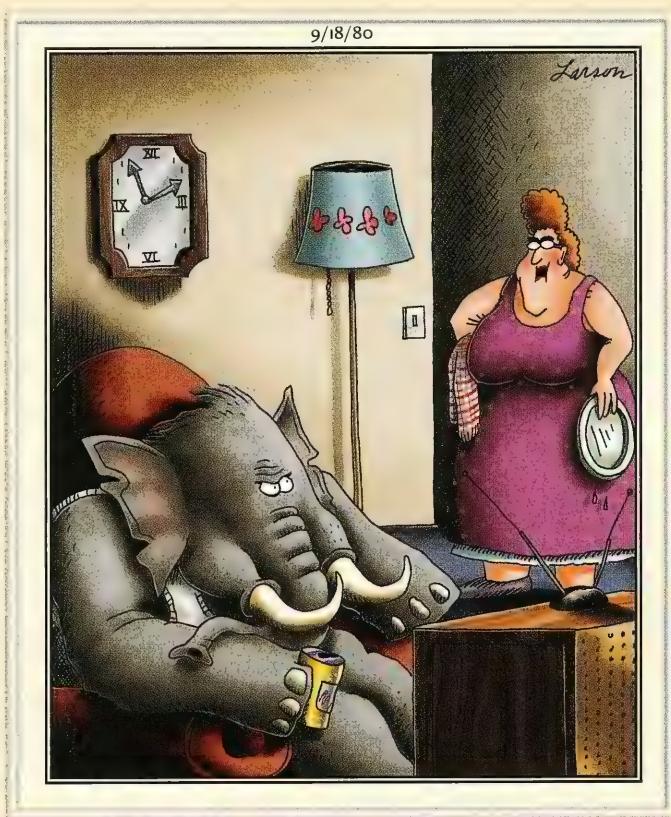


"Nice try."

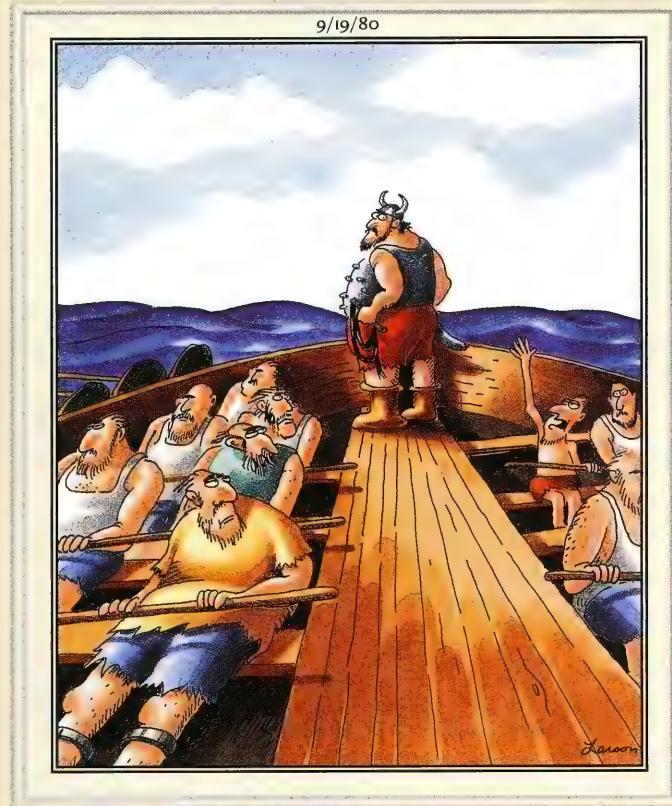
9/20/80



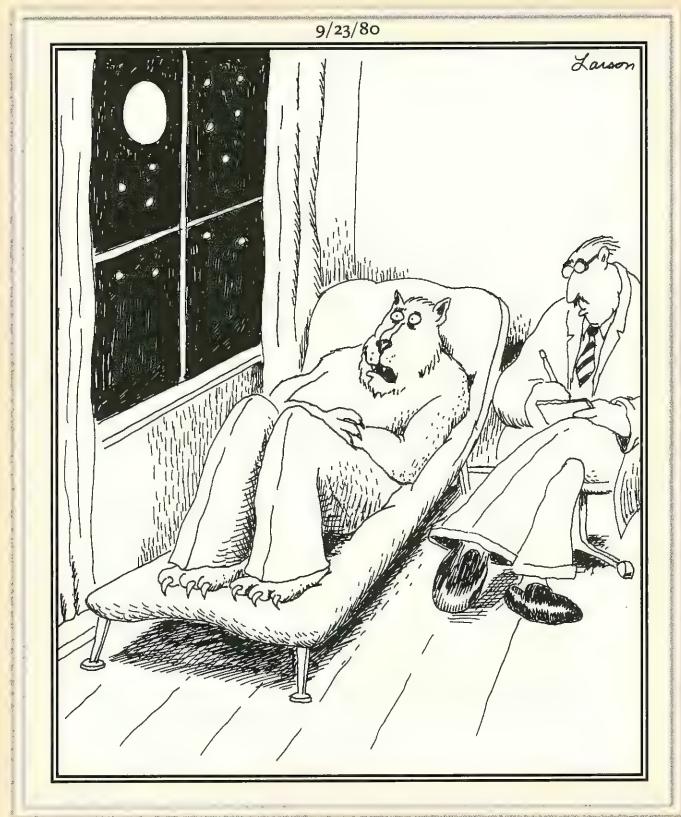
"Well, there goes the neighborhood."



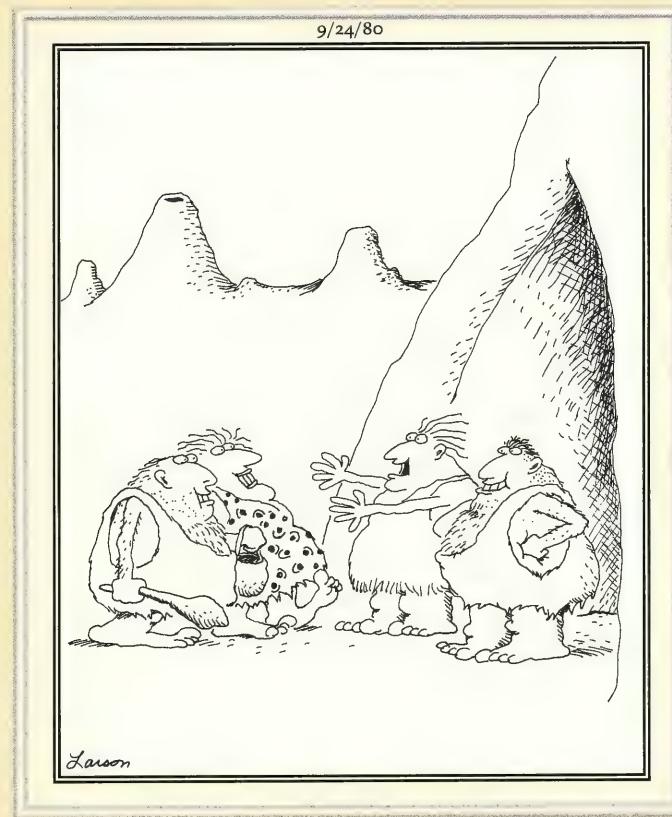
"Mother was right! ... I never should have married outside my own species!"



"Yoo-hoo! Oh, yoo-hoo! ... I think I'm getting a blister."



"I can't take this curse any longer! ... Every sunrise I change into this hairless, frail little man who couldn't hurt a fly."



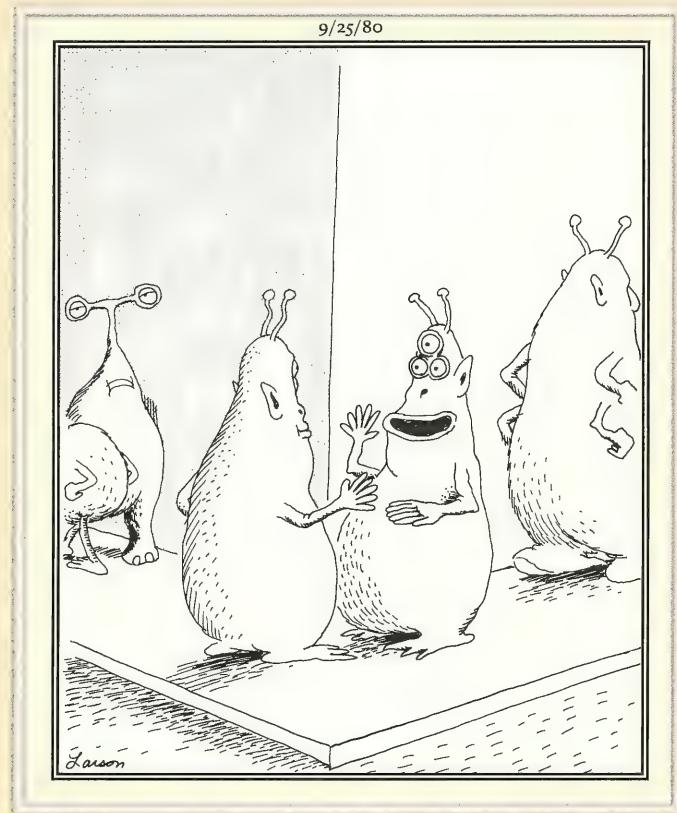
"Zag and Thena! ... Come on in and act uncivilized!"

September 1980

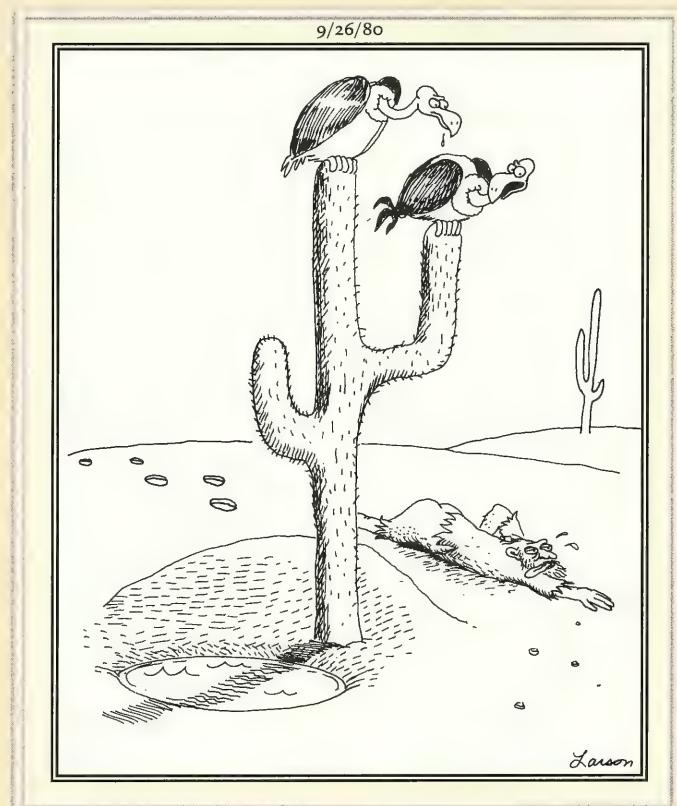
9/22/80



"I guess he made it. ... It's been more than a week  
since he went over the wall."

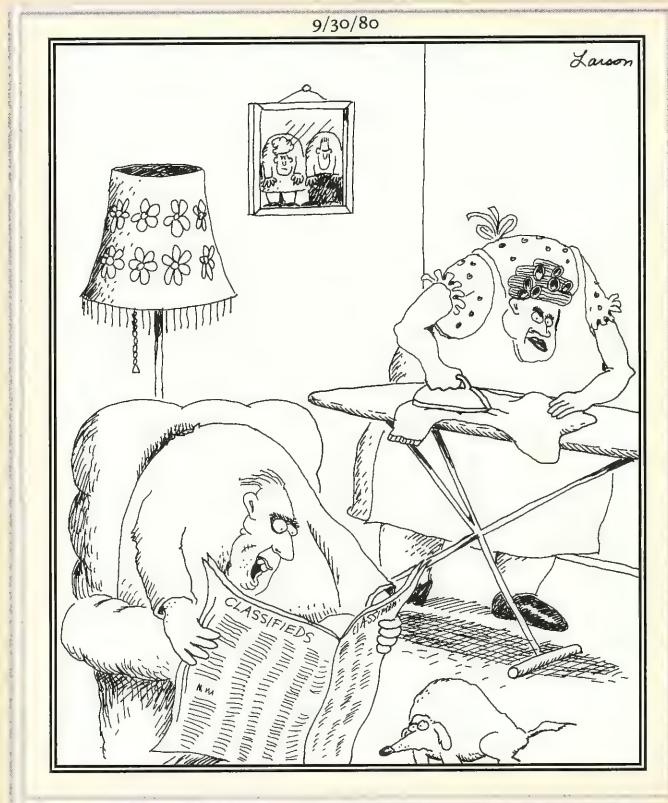
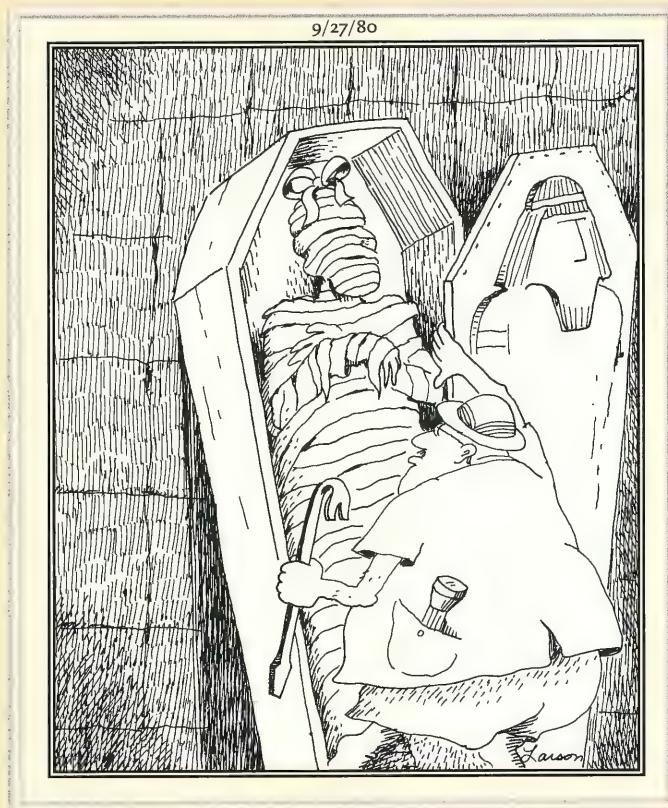


"Hey, Zoran! What's happenin'? ...  
Give me six!"

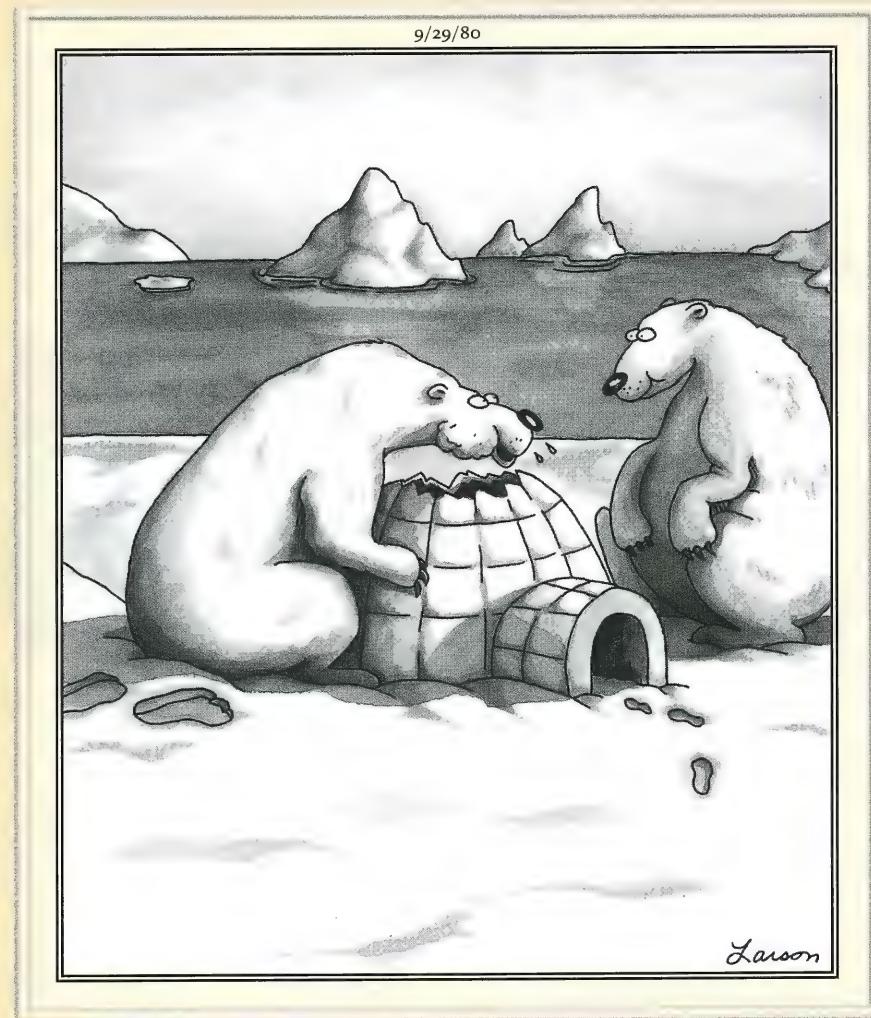


"We're in luck. I don't think he sees it."

September 1980



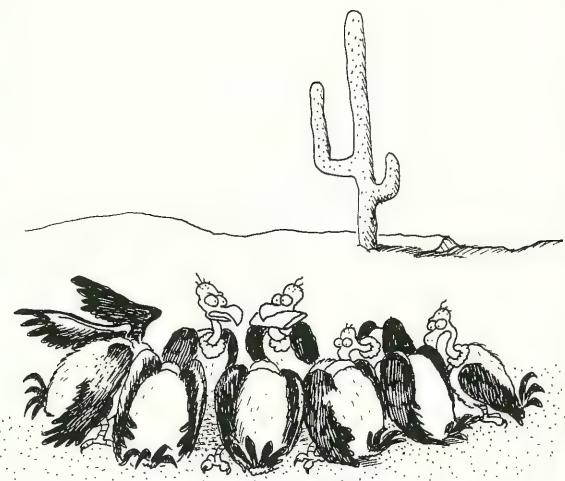
"Hey! Here's one! ... 'Mad scientist  
needs assistant.'"



"Oh hey! I just love these things! ... Crunchy on  
the outside and a chewy center!"

October 1980

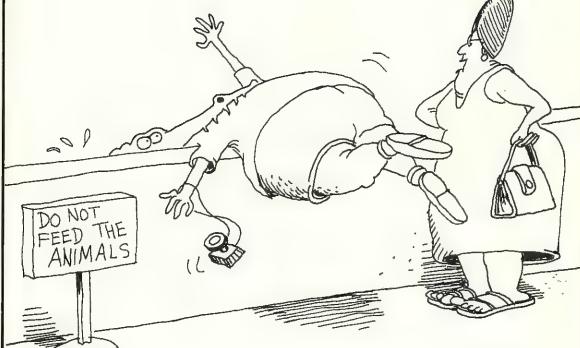
10/1/80



Larson

"You fool! You can't eat that ... it's a wallet!"

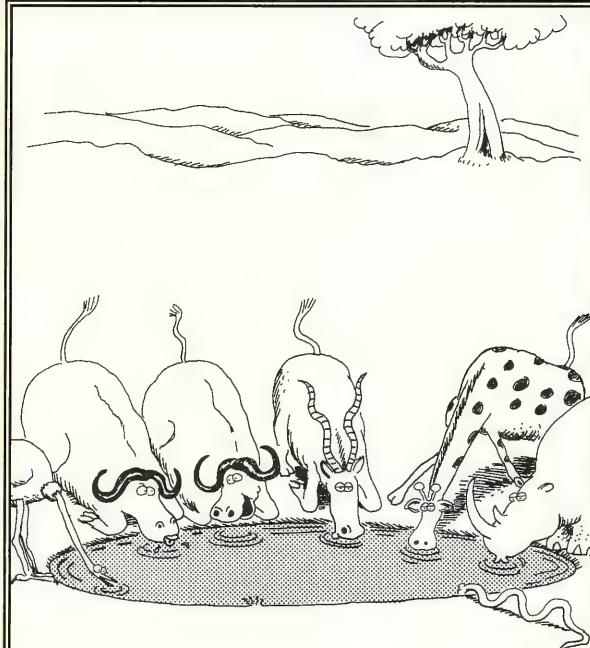
10/2/80



Larson

"You're embarrassing me, Warren."

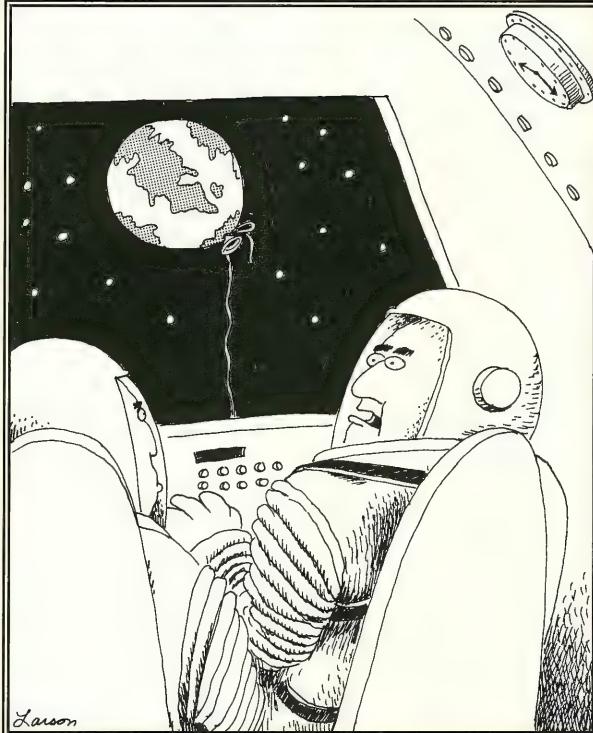
10/3/80



Larson

"So ... come here often?"

10/4/80



Larson

"Listen. I think we better keep this quiet."

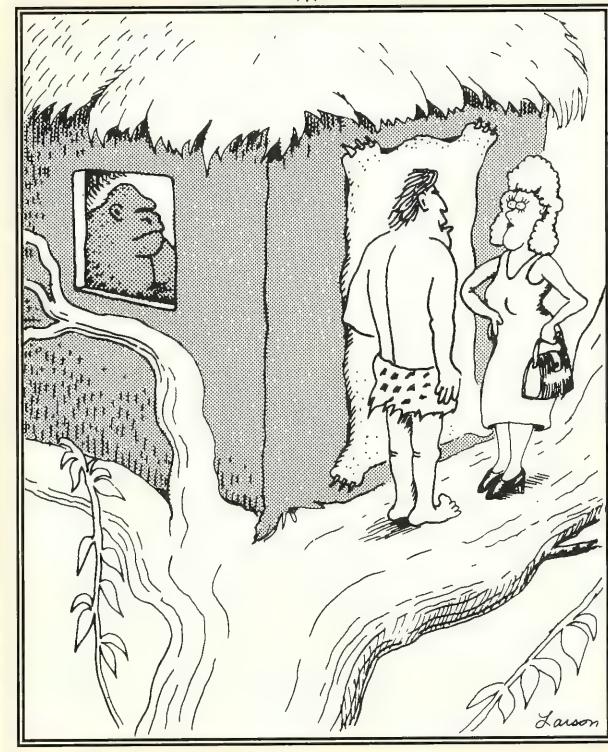
October 1980

10/9/80



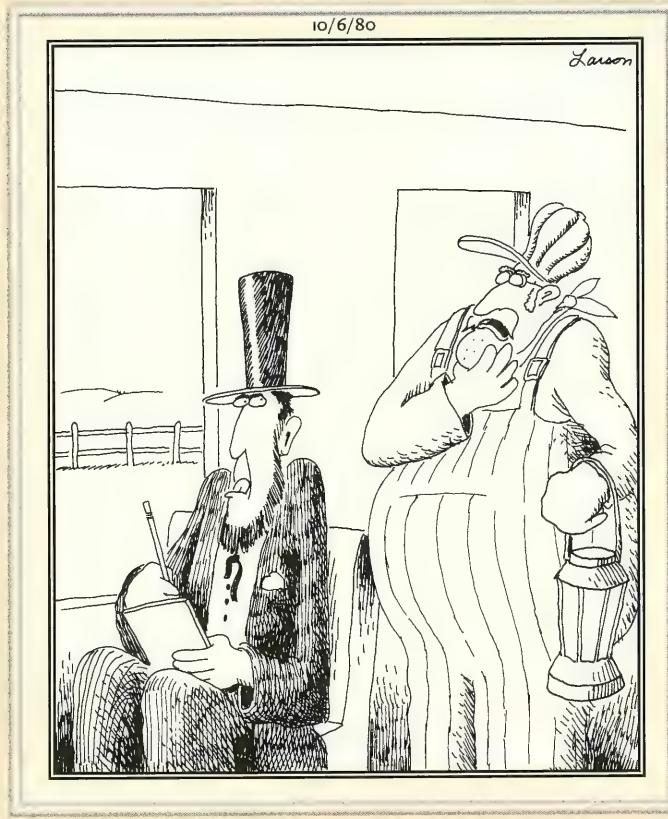
"The contact points must be dirty. ... Just click it up and down a few times."

10/7/80



10/6/80

Larson



"Well, Mr. President, let's see—carry the one, take away three, carry the two ... that would be four score and seven years ago."

"My folks are a little different ... just ignore them if they start looking through your hair for fleas and things."

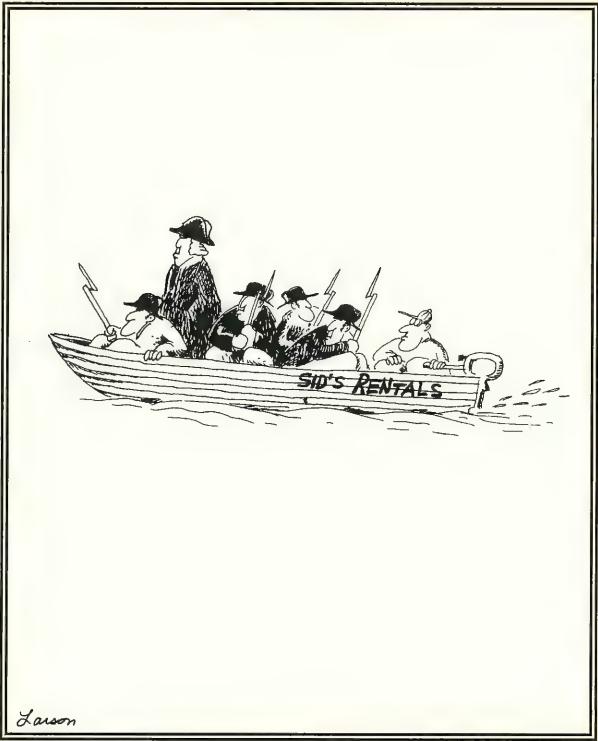
October 1980

10/8/80



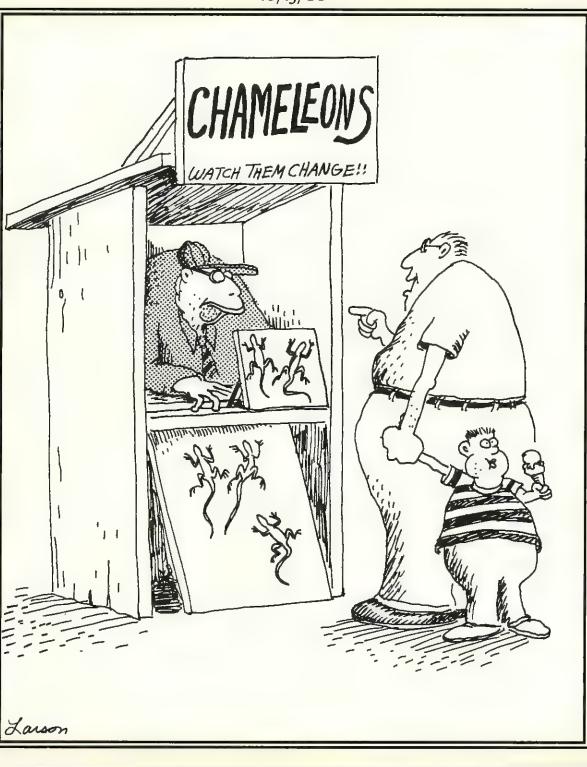
"We better eat it ... or we'll get that old lecture again about the birds starving in Asia."

10/11/80



Larson

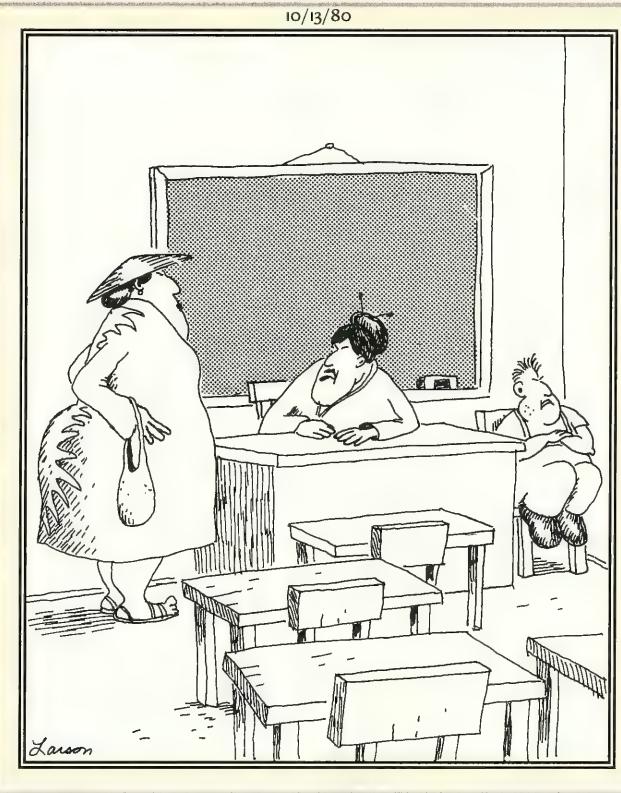
10/15/80



Larson

"Well, my gosh, Mr. Turner ... I remember you selling these things thirty years ago!"

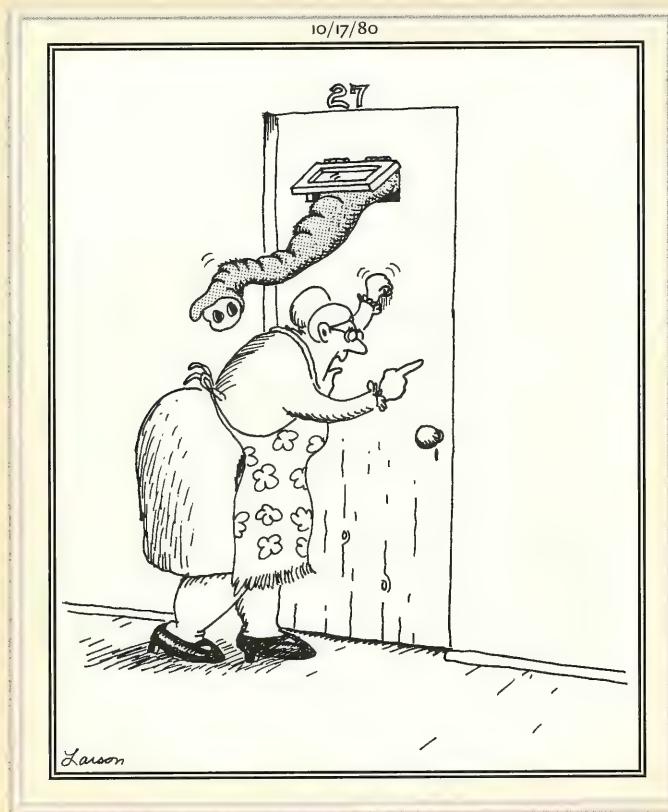
10/13/80



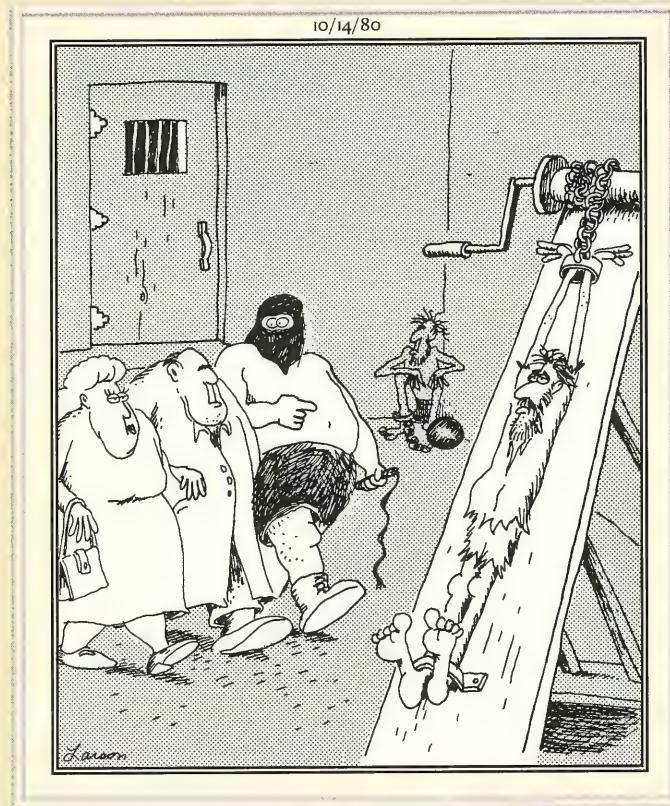
Larson

"And in addition, Mrs. Khan, little Genghis disrupts the class, fights with other children, and completely lacks any leadership ability."

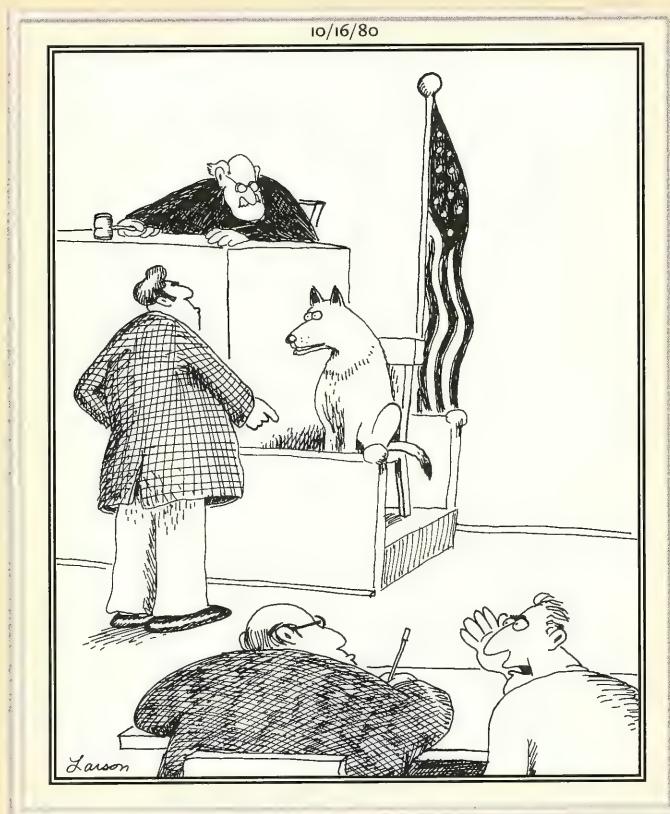
October 1980



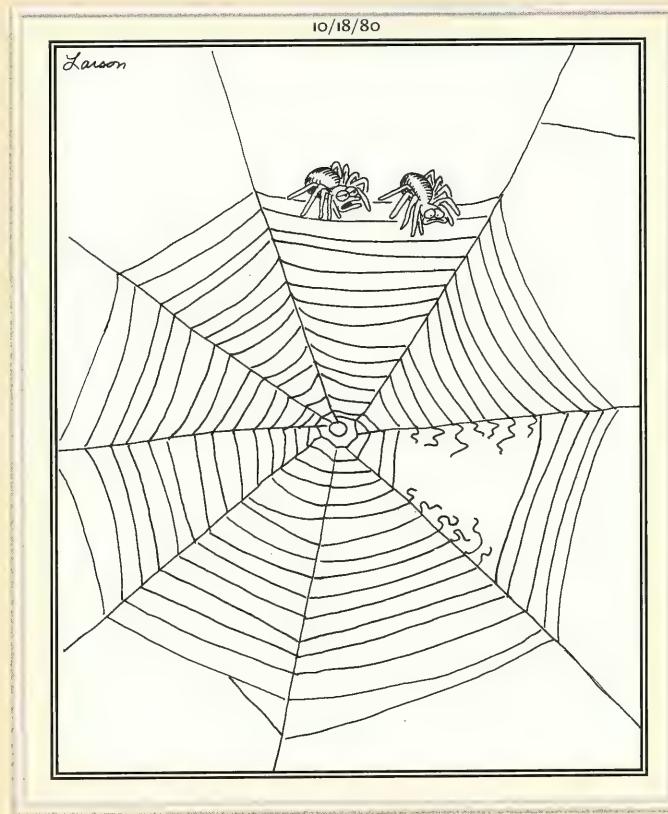
"Young man, if you've got a pet in there ..."



"Now over here, Mom and Dad, is what we call 'The Rack,' and I'll show you how it works."

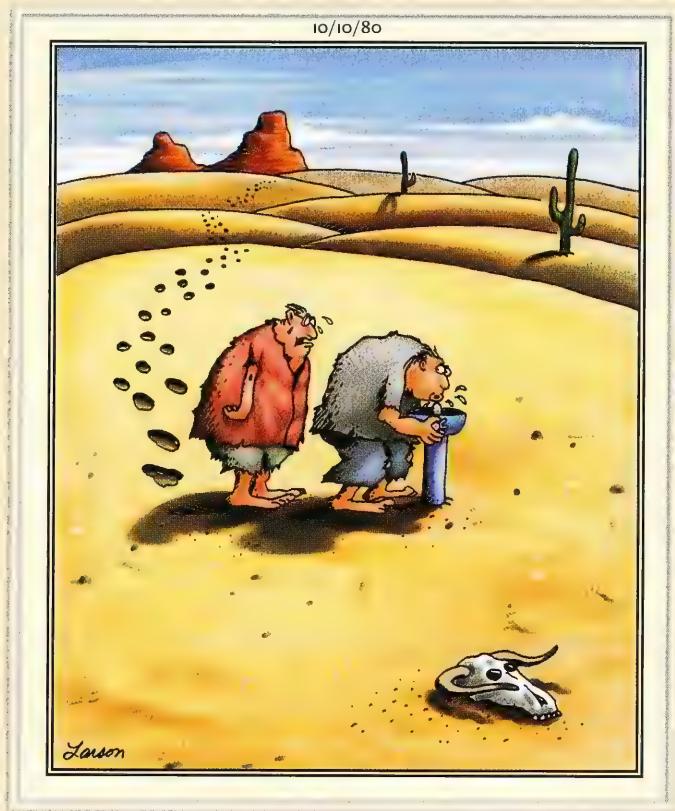


"I could have guessed. ... My friends all warned me that this breed will sometimes turn on you."

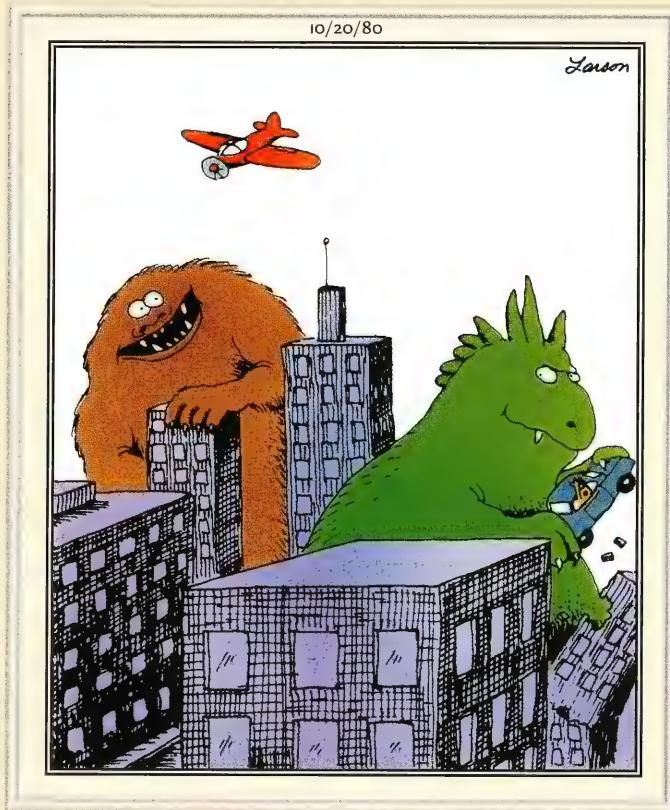


"Don't take it so hard. ... Everyone's got a story about the one that got away."

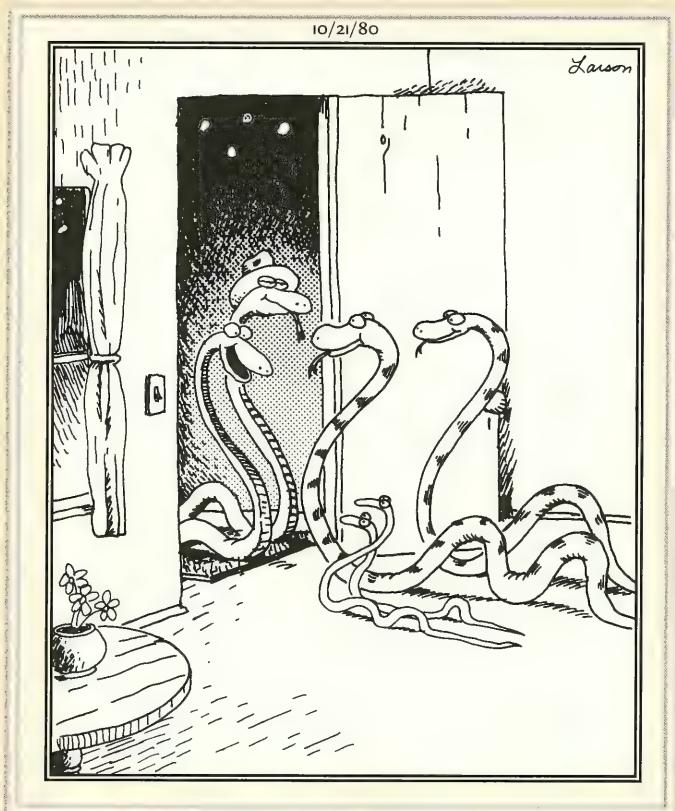
October 1980



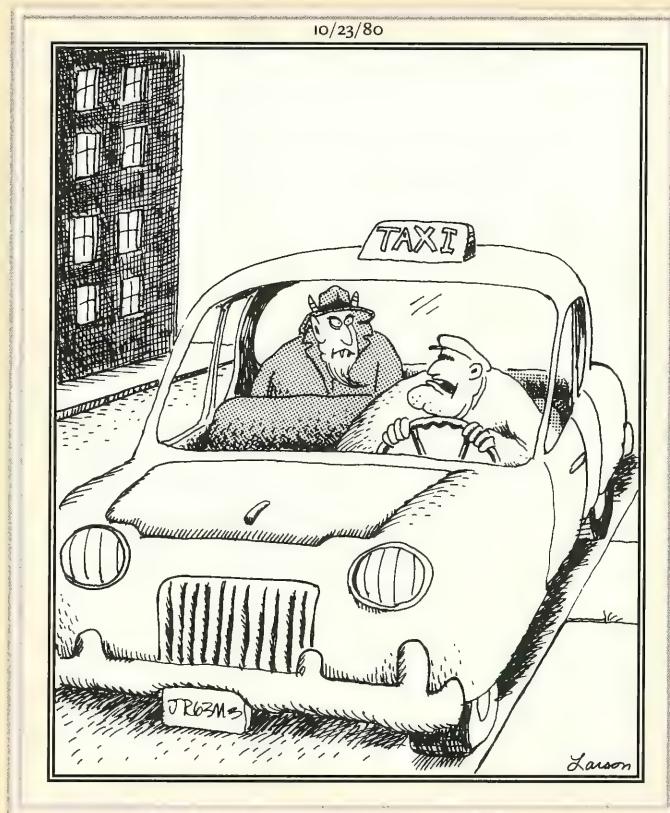
"Hey c'mon! Don't put your mouth on it!"



"Hey! Is that you, Dave? ... Small world!"

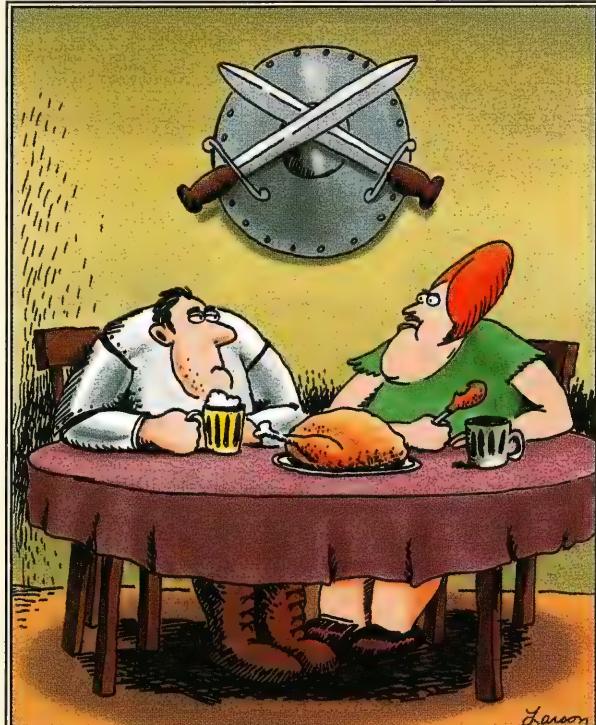


"And oh my goodness! ... Aren't the children getting long!"



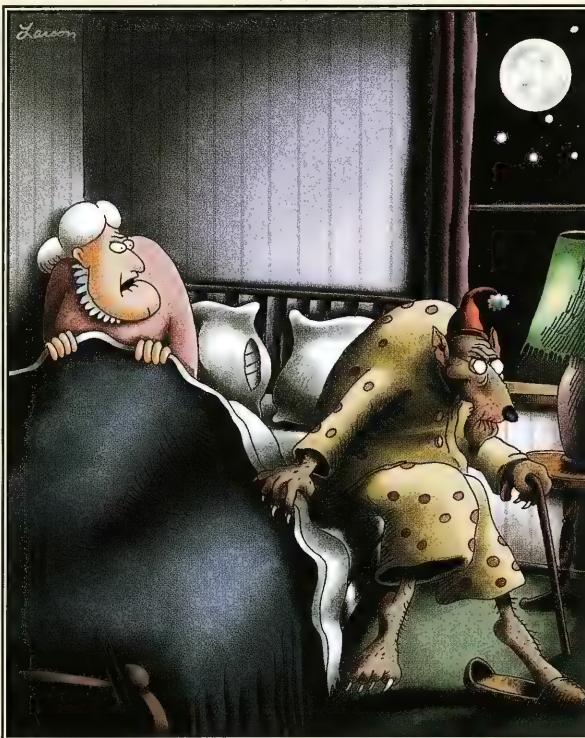
"Hey, Buddy! Nobody tells me to go *there* and gets away with it!"

10/27/80



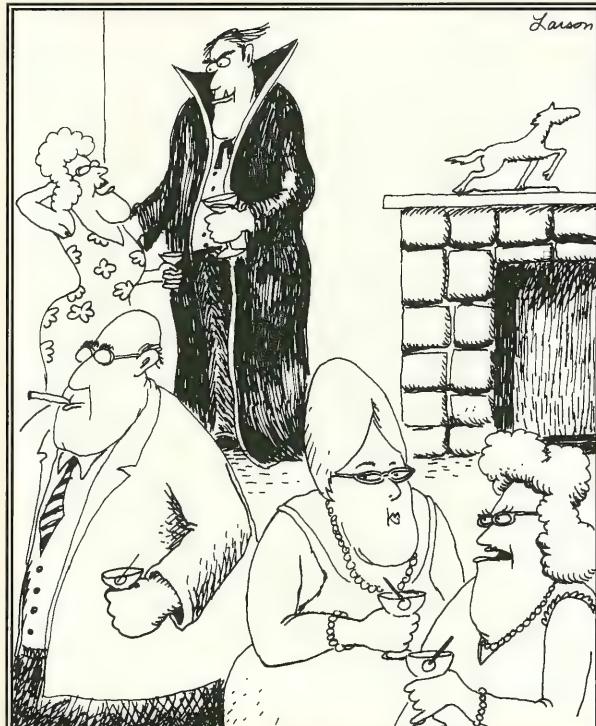
"And another thing! ... I want you to be more assertive! I'm tired of everyone calling you Alexander the Pretty-Good!"

10/22/80



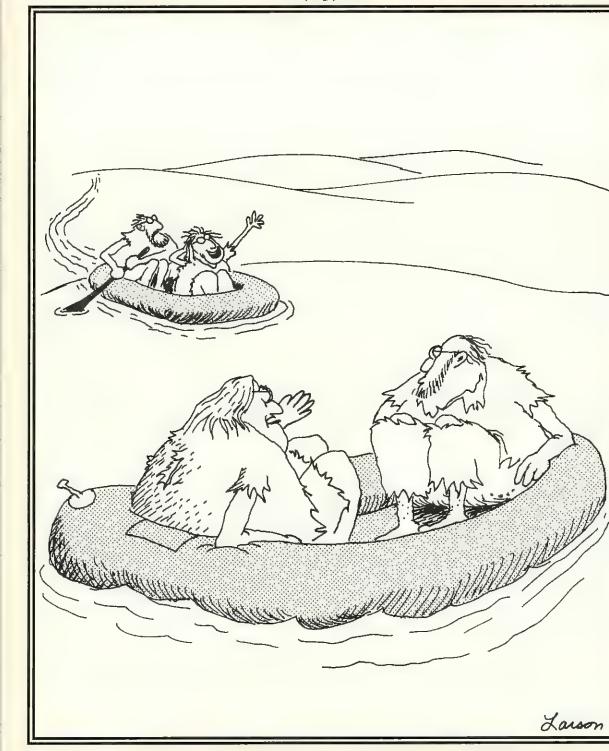
"Well I just think I've been putting up with this silly curse of yours long enough!"

10/25/80



"Well, it looks like Sylvia has latched on to another fly-by-night boyfriend."

10/29/80



"Gad! Here come those pesky Andersons again ... probably want to borrow a cup of water."

October 1980

10/30/80



Larson

"I seeeeeeee you!"

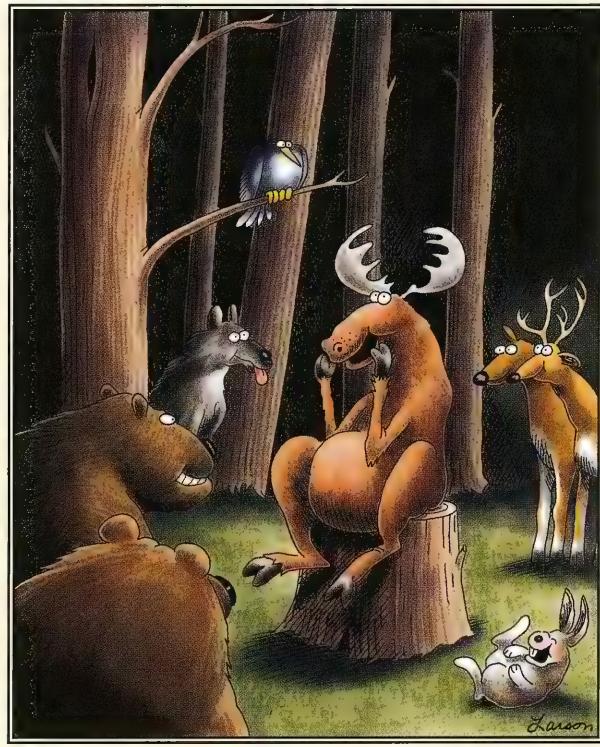
10/31/80



Larson

"Just keep him calm for a couple of days. ...  
He's got lockbody."

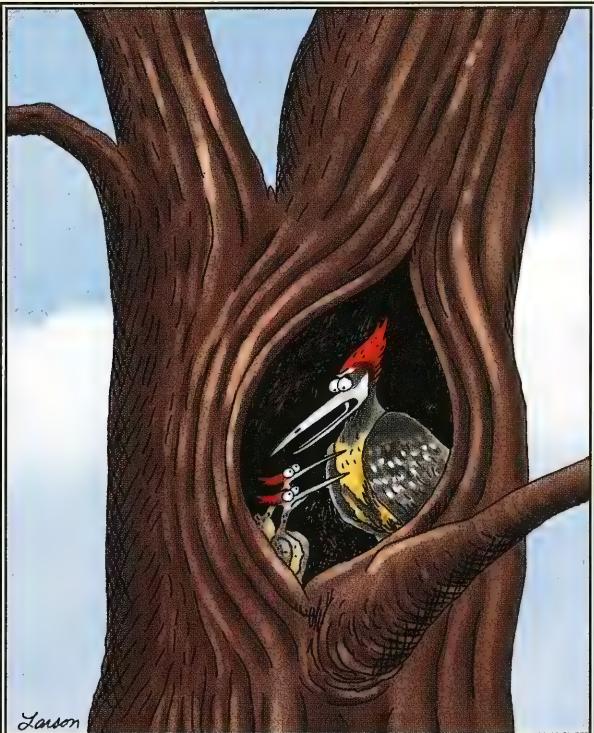
10/24/80



Larson

"Wait! Wait! Here's another one—the screams  
of a man lost in the woods."

10/28/80



Larson

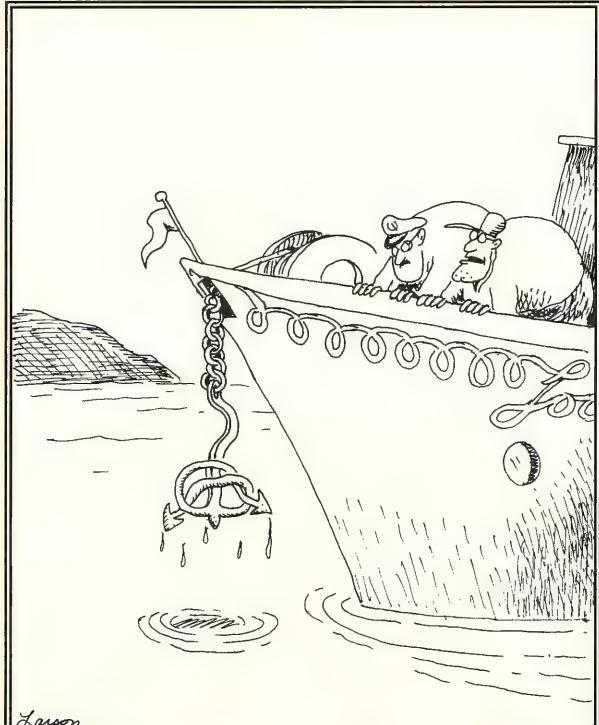
"I don't know where your father is tonight. ...  
No doubt out bangin' his head against some tree."

November 1980

11/1/80



11/4/80



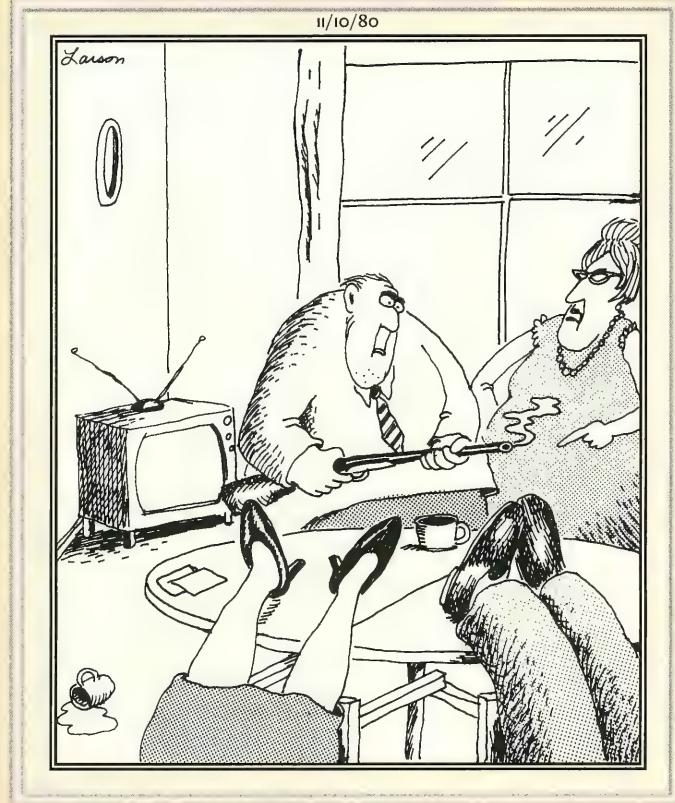
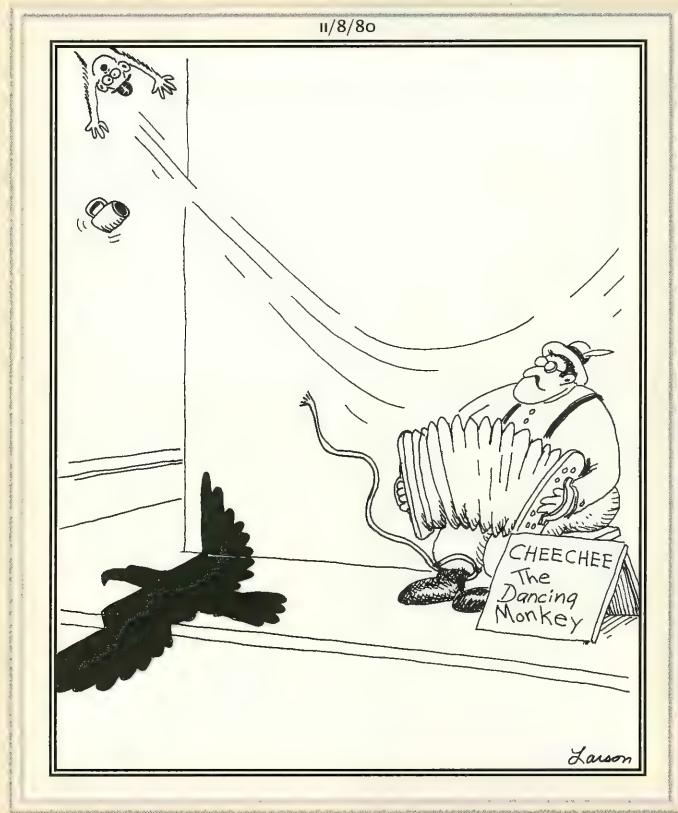
"Listen, Wadsworth ... as far as I'm concerned we can just go anchor somewhere else."

11/3/80

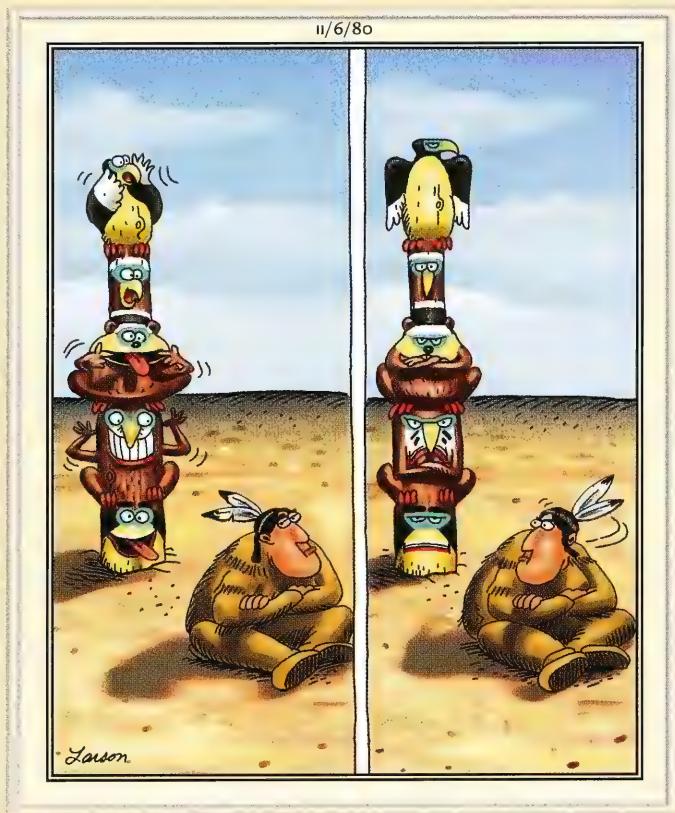
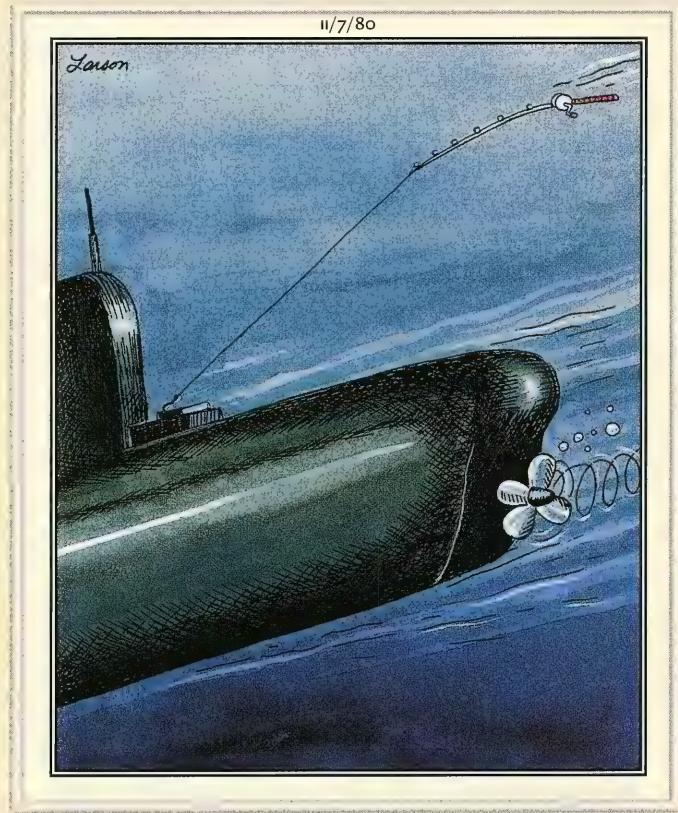


"Well ... since the elevator's power is dead, why don't we all just introduce ourselves?"

November 1980



"That settles it, Carl! ... From now on, you're getting only decaffeinated coffee!"

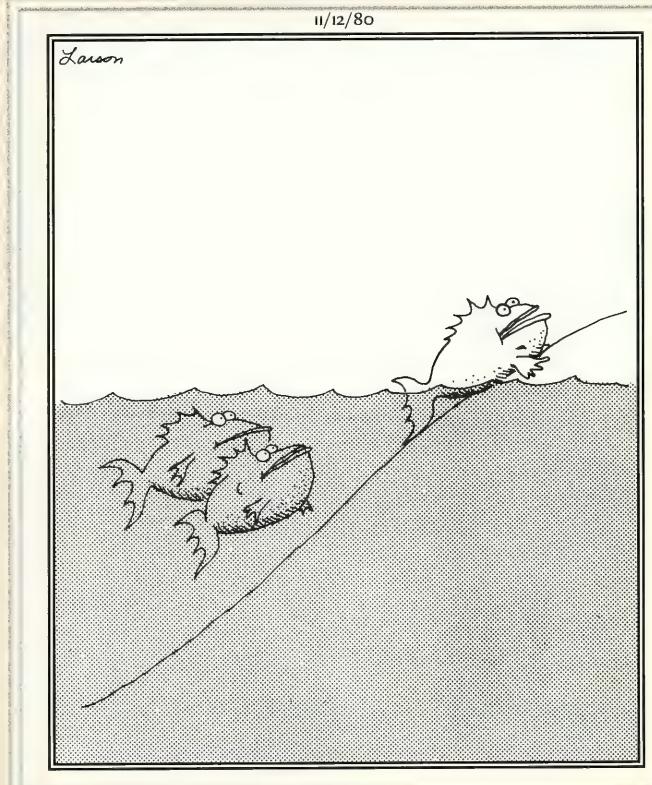


11/13/80



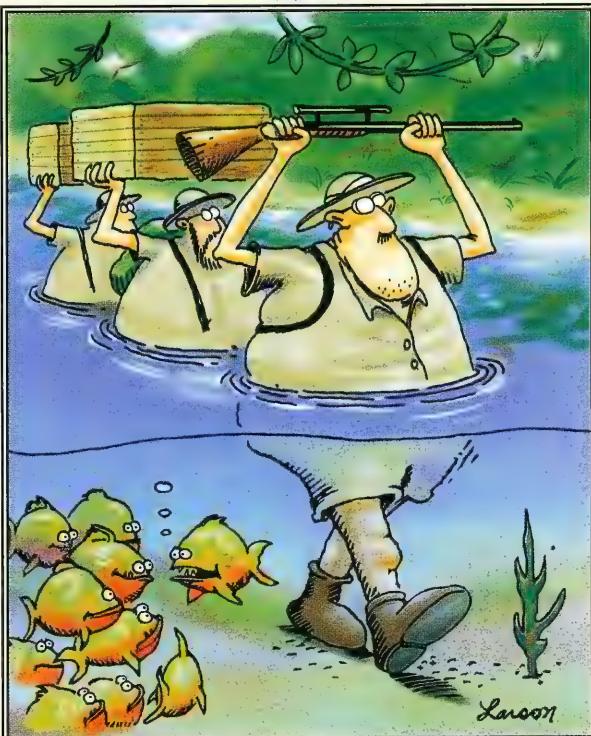
"Well, we both knew there'd be some adjustments moving from a small town to a big city."

11/12/80



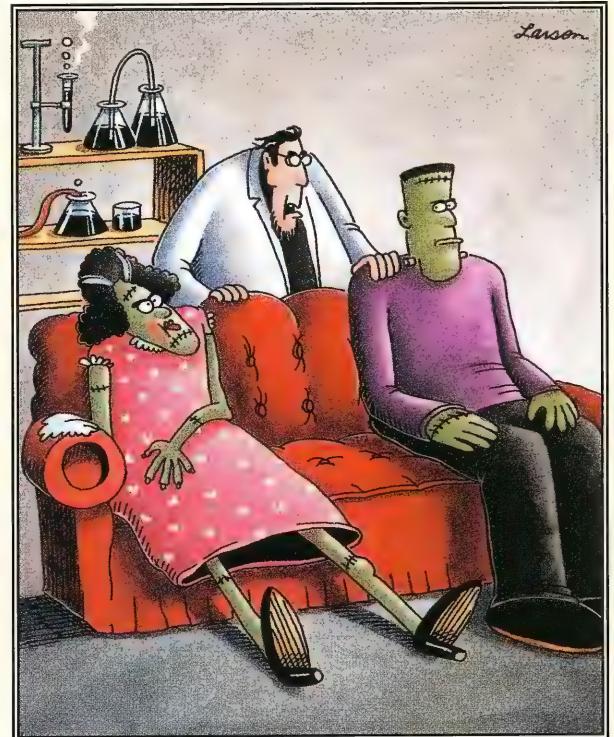
"One small step for a fish, one giant leap for fishkind."

11/14/80



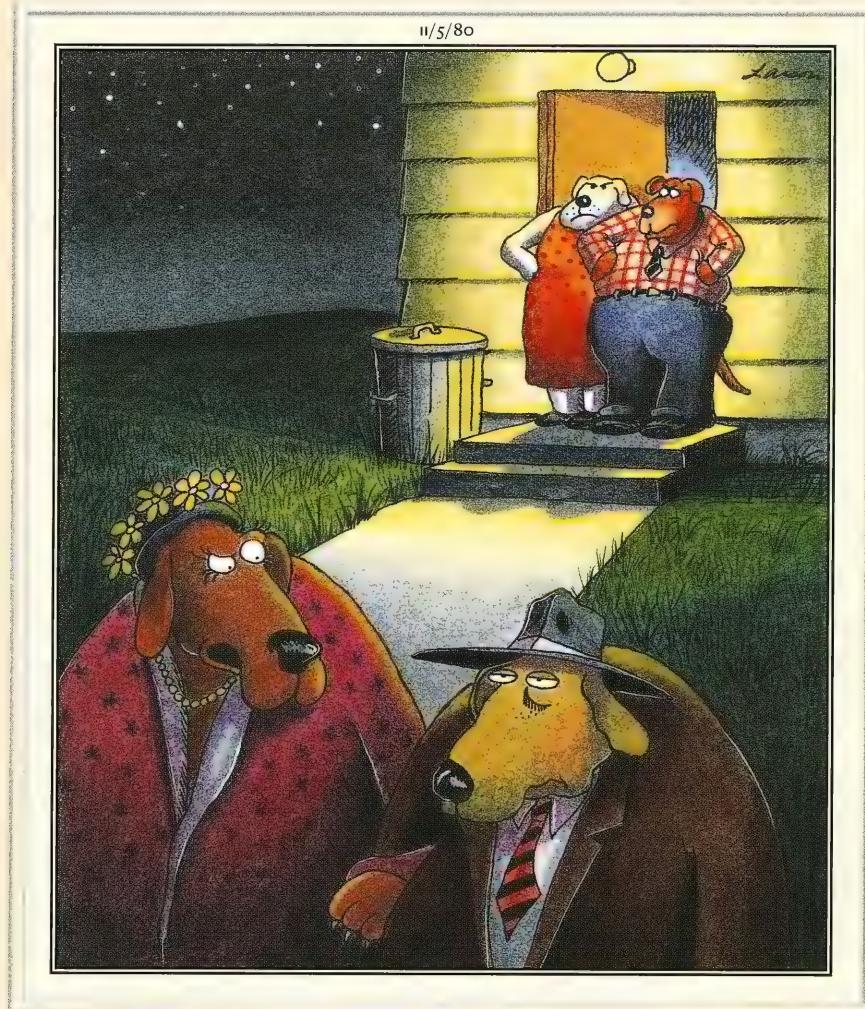
"Just nibble at first. ... But when you hear them yell 'Piranha!'—go for it."

11/11/80

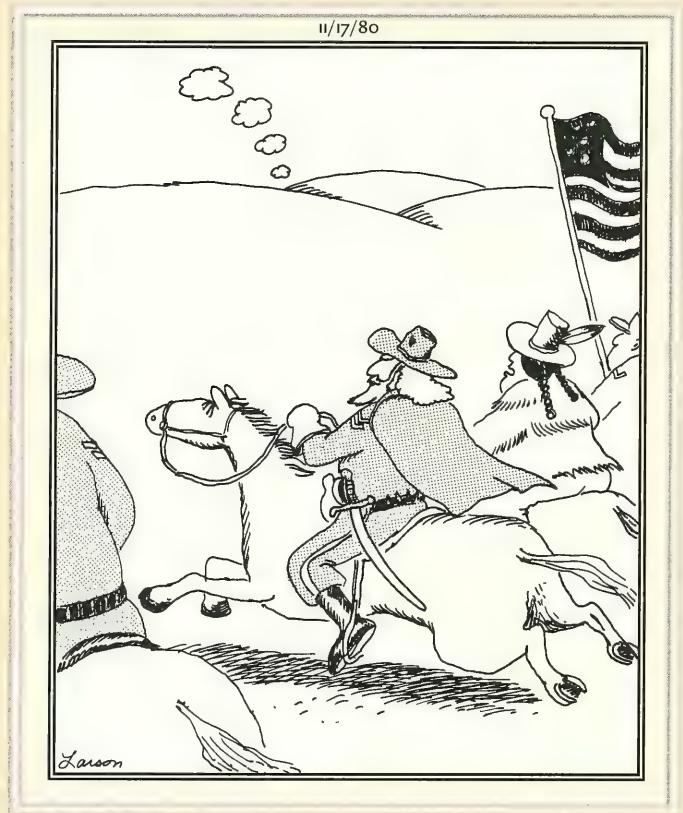
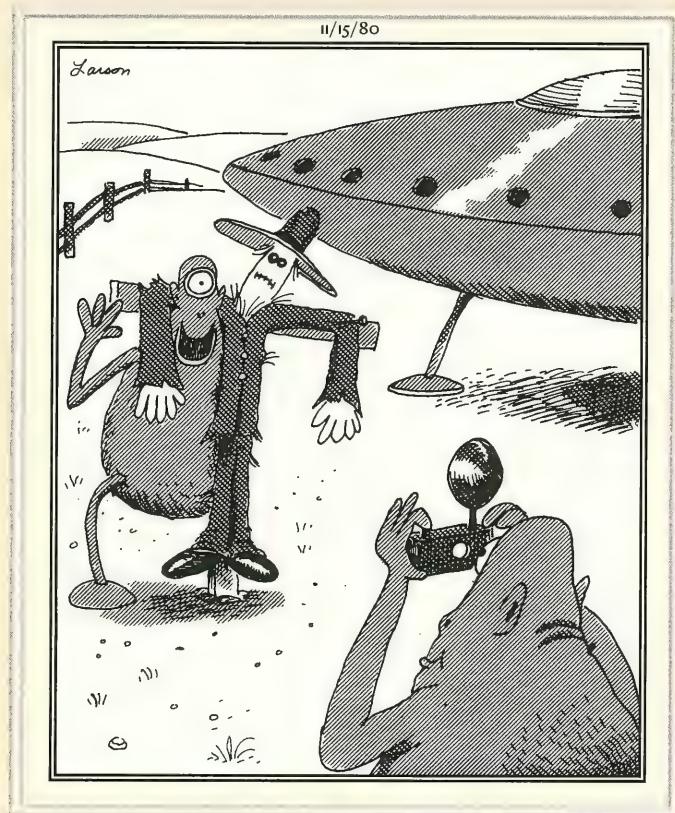


"Hey, c'mon now! ... You two were made for each other!"

November 1980

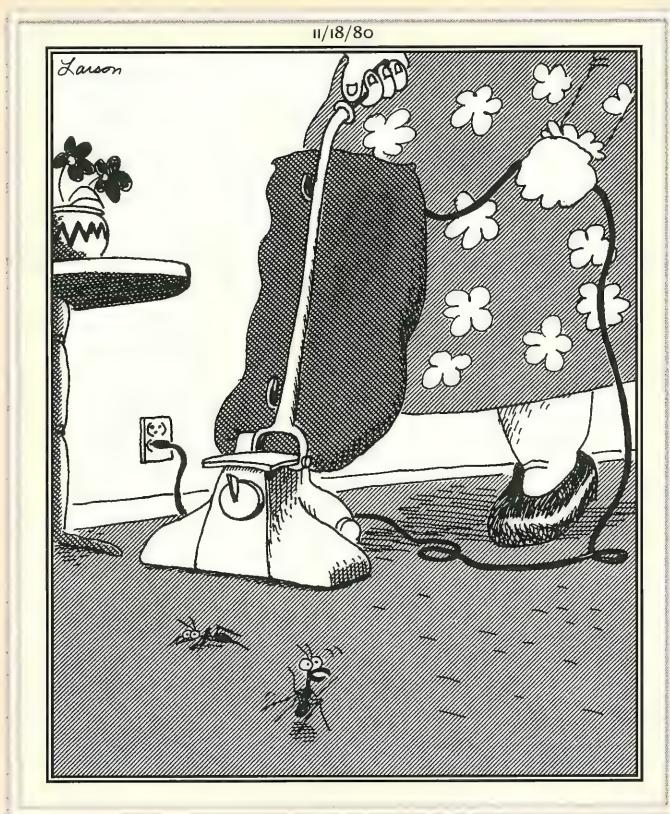


"One of the nicest evenings I've ever spent at the Wilsons'...  
and then you had to go and do that on the rug!"

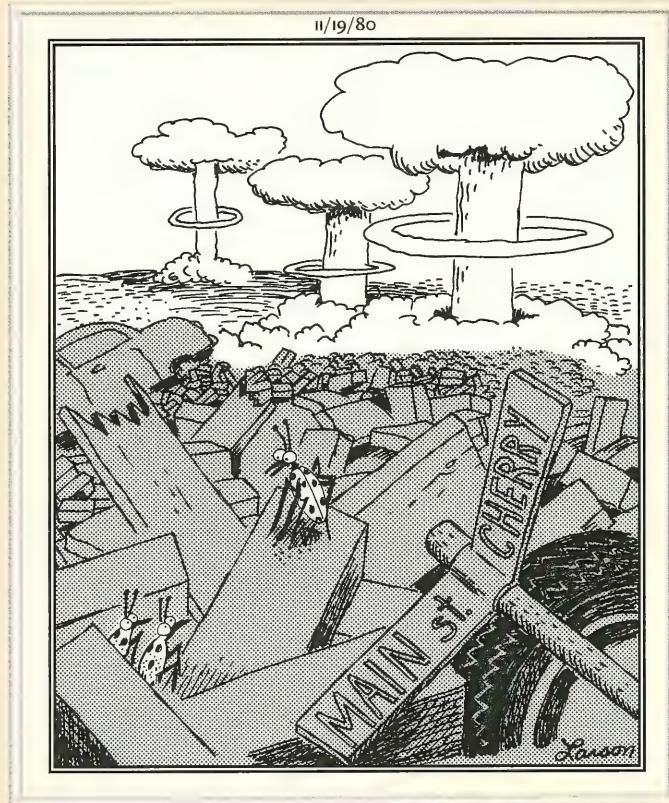


"Excuse me, General Custer, sir ... but smoke  
signals say, 'Ready ... or ... not ... here ...  
we ... come.'"

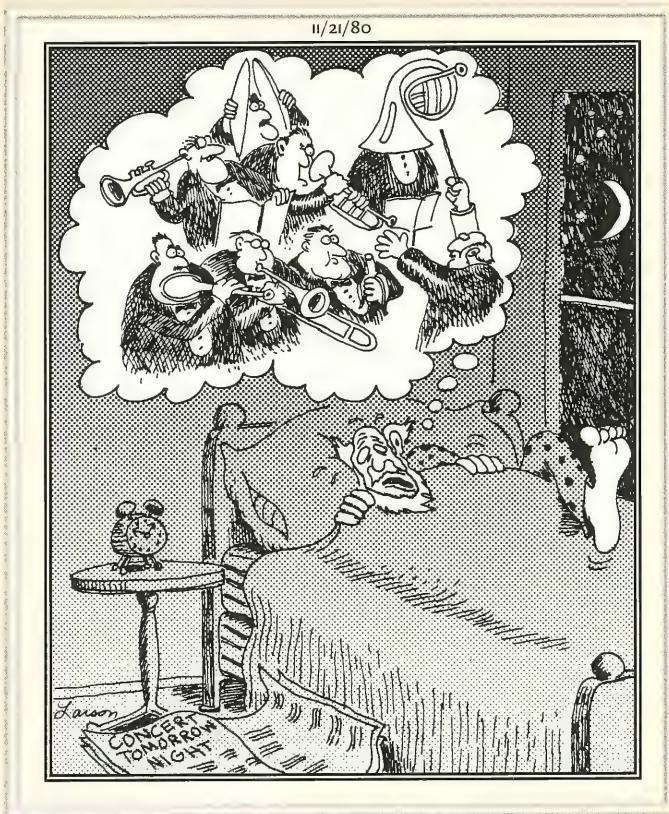
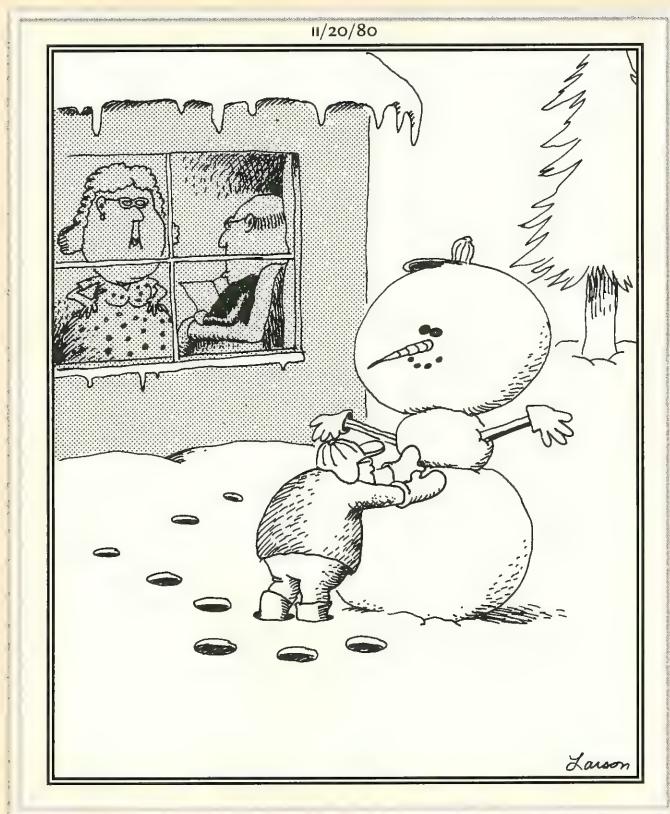
November 1980



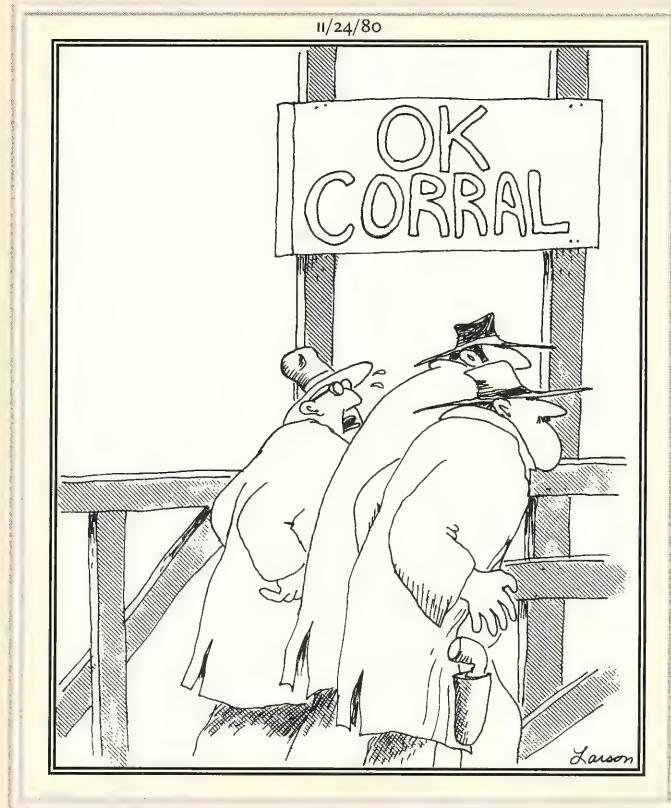
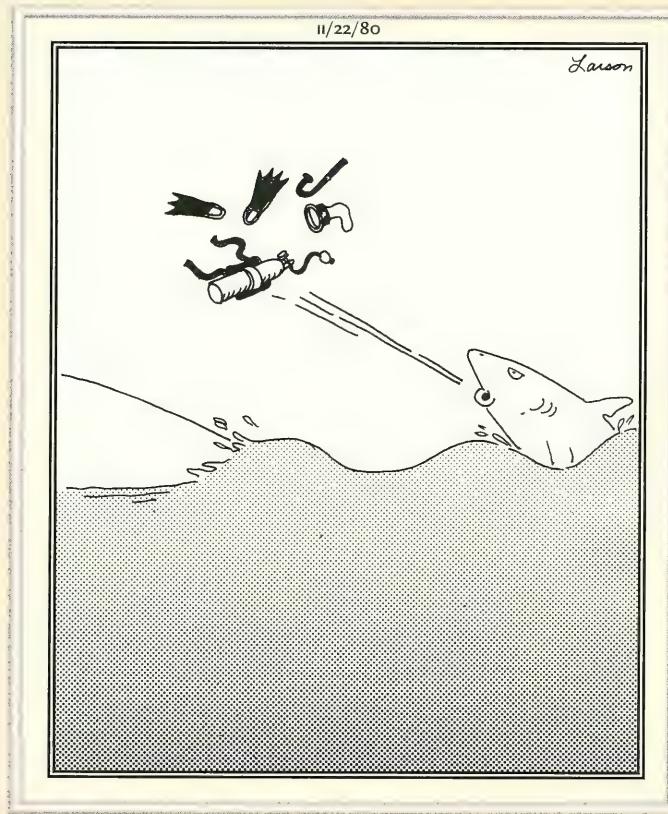
"Look out! ... It's a black hole!"



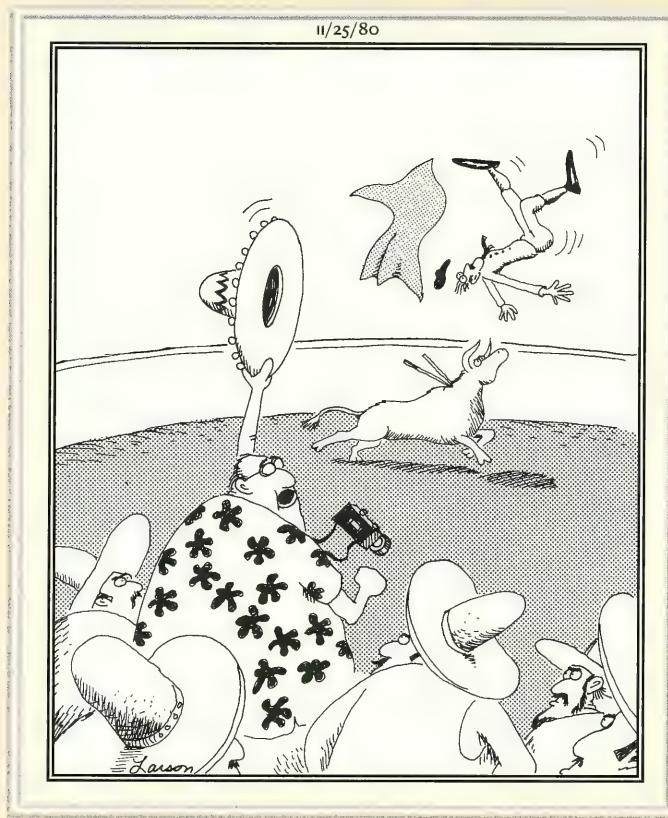
"Come on out. ... I think they're through."



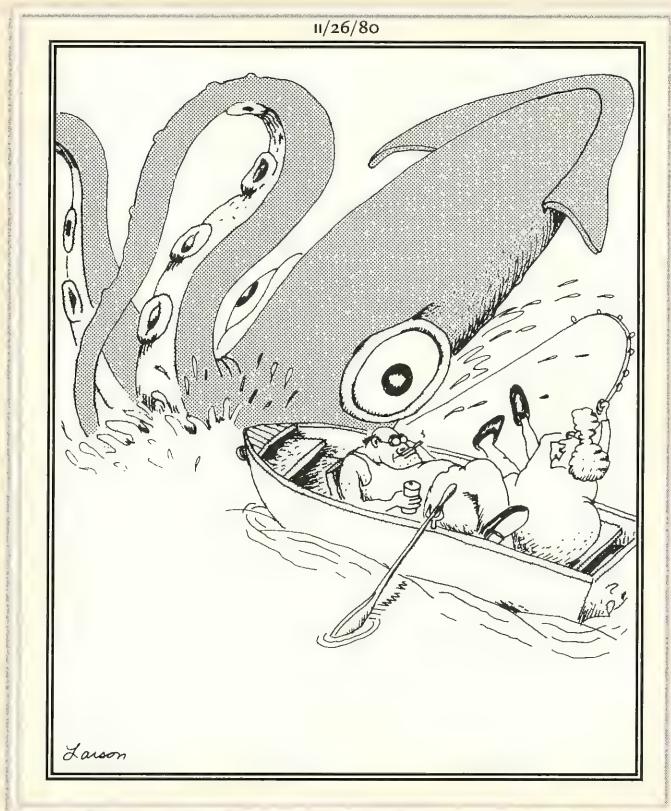
November 1980



"Hey look, guys ... maybe we got the wrong address."

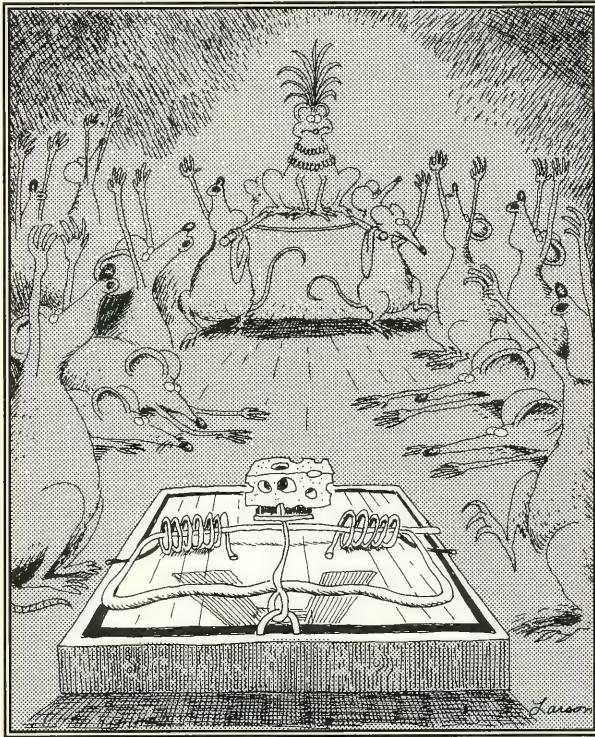


"Olé!"

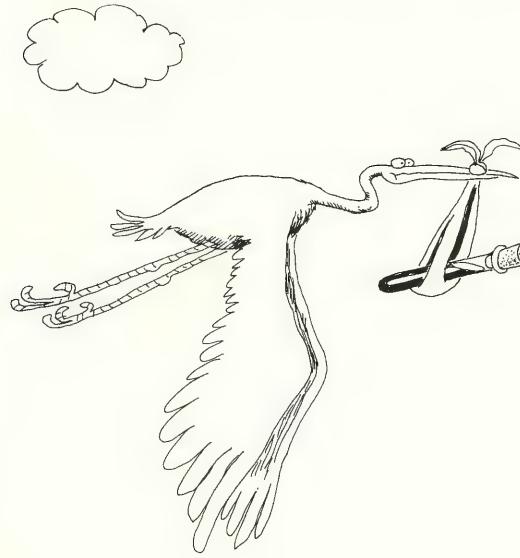


"Oh, Sidney! Look! I wasn't snagged on the bottom!"

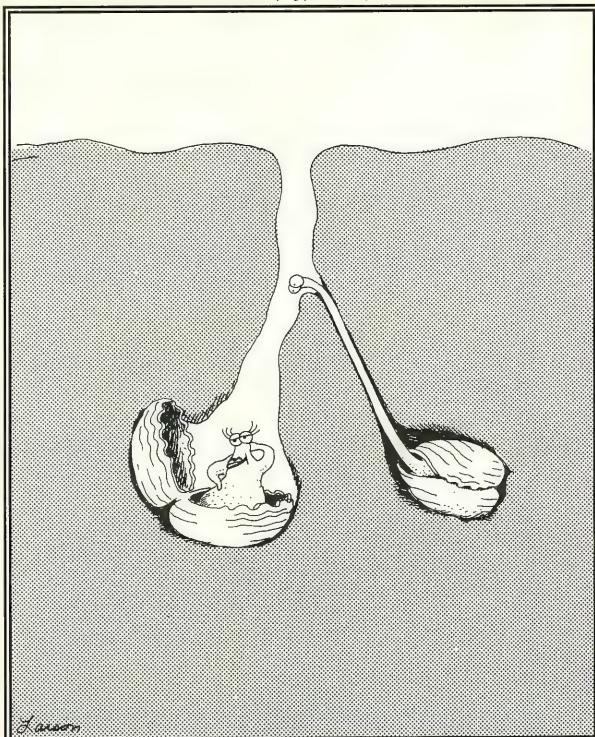
11/27/80



11/28/80



11/29/80



Dec 13 1980

Dear Gary Larson

Your cartoon blips are the best thing happening in American journalism. For years I have followed the advice of M. Monroe, or someone, to watch the comics to find what's happening. Your wit and insight are a good sign.

Congratulations.

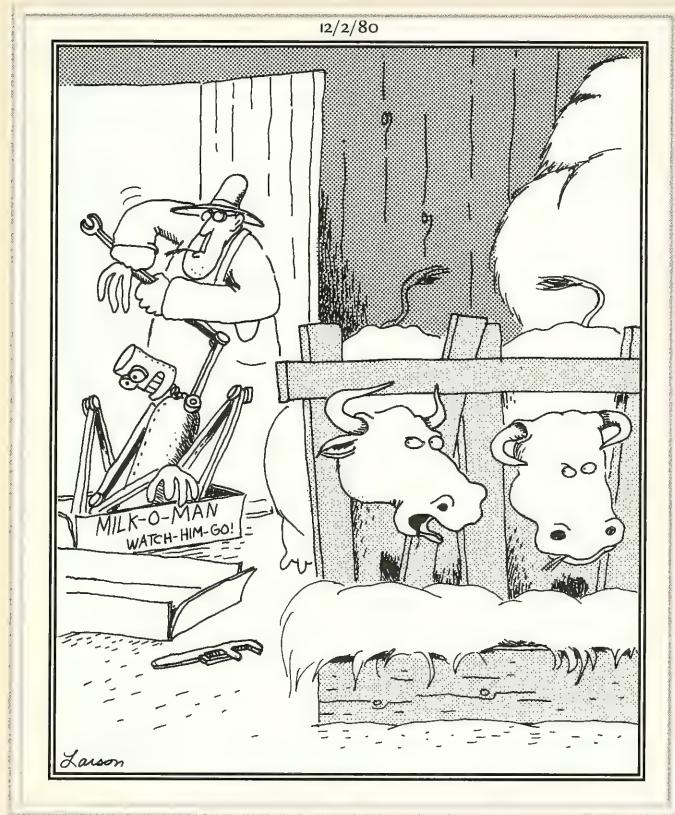
*Timothy Leary*

P.S? Have you published a collection of your work yet. If not please do so soon!!

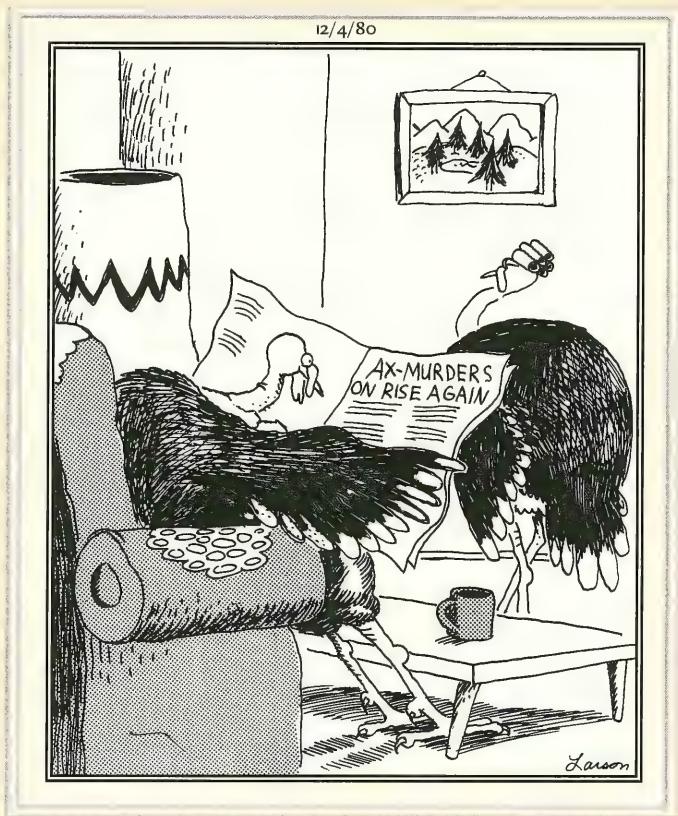
December 1980



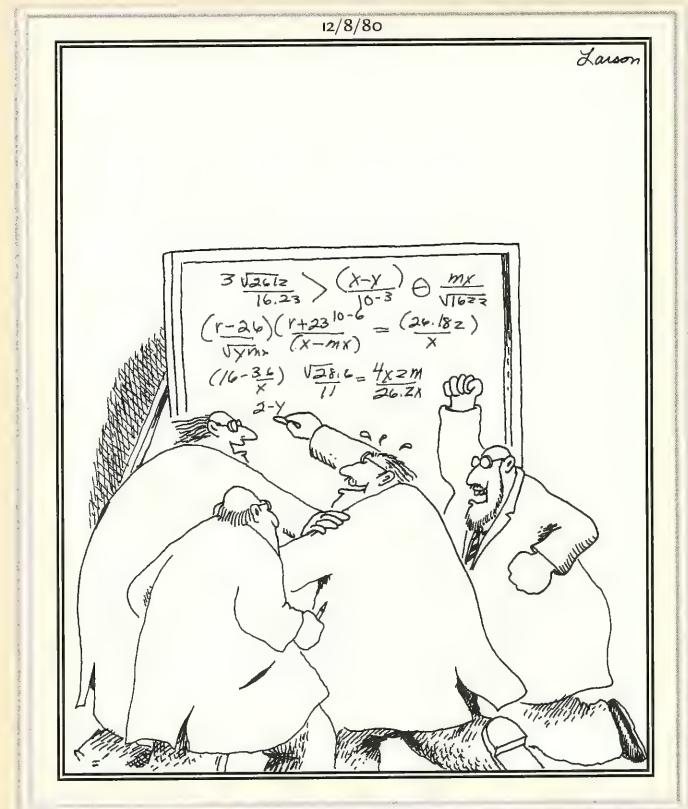
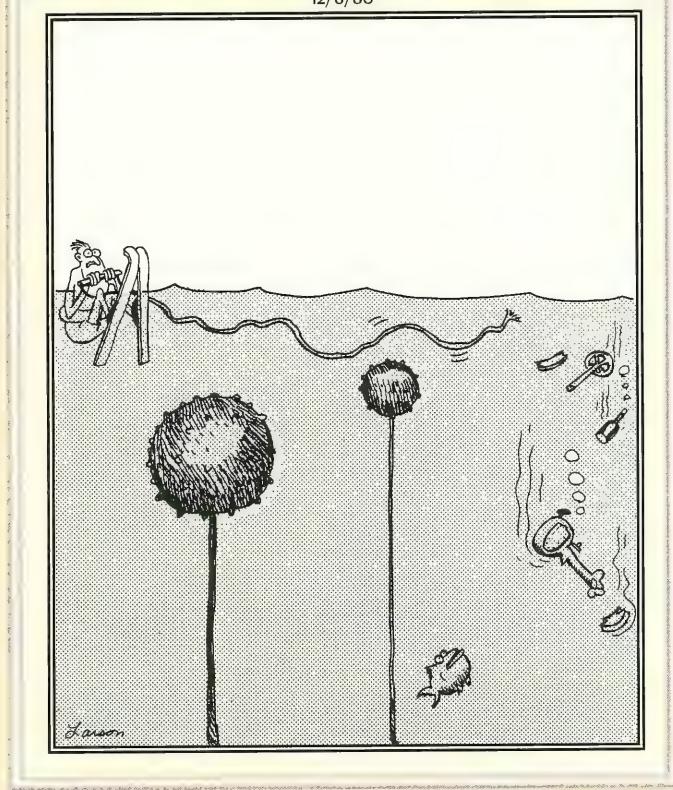
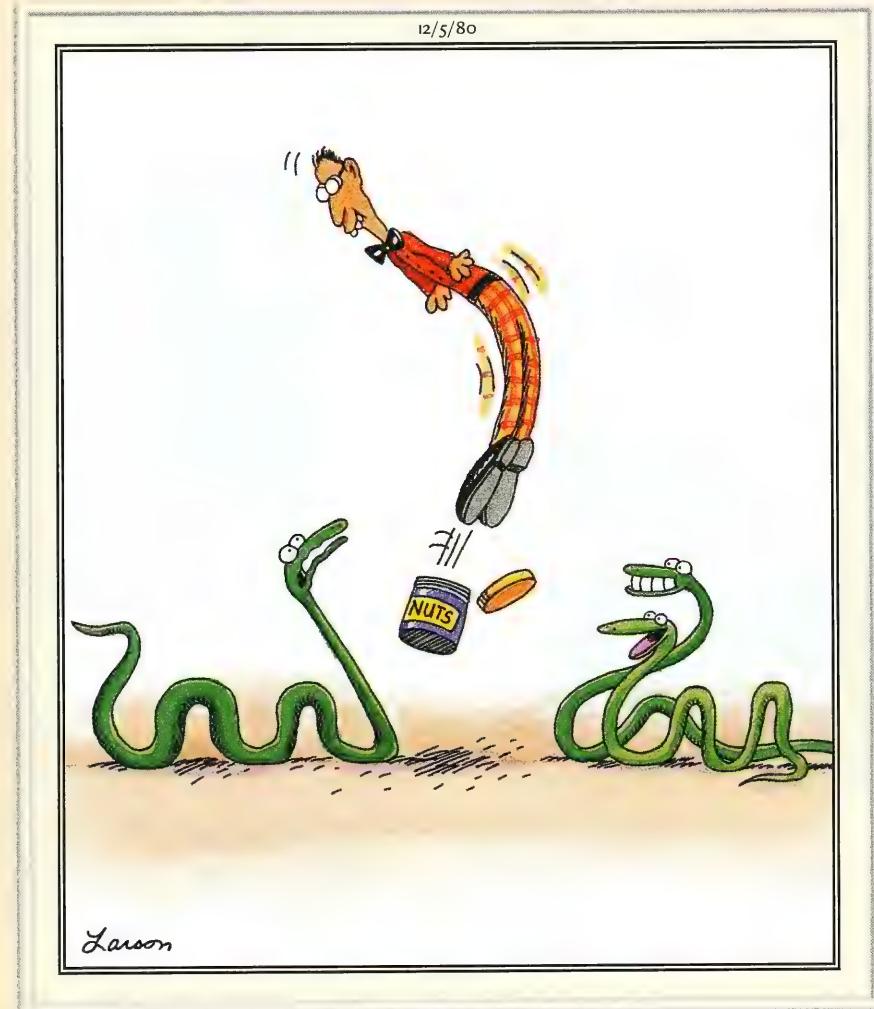
"See, Frank? Keep the light in their eyes and you can bag them without any trouble at all."



"I don't like the looks of this."



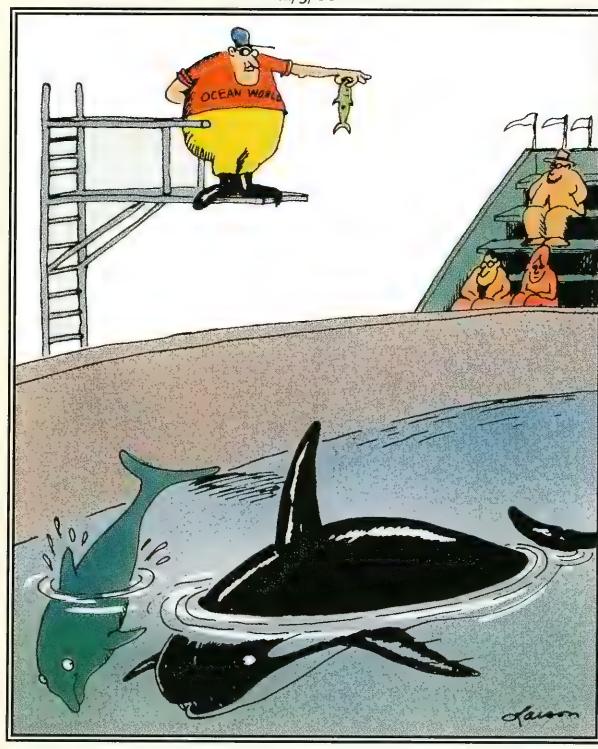
December 1980



"Go for it, Sidney! You've got it! You've got it!  
Good hands! Don't choke!"

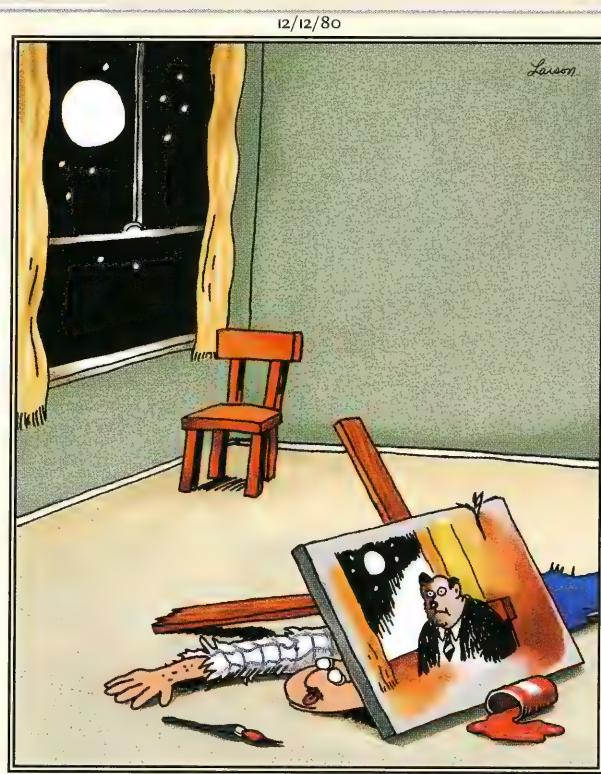
December 1980

12/3/80

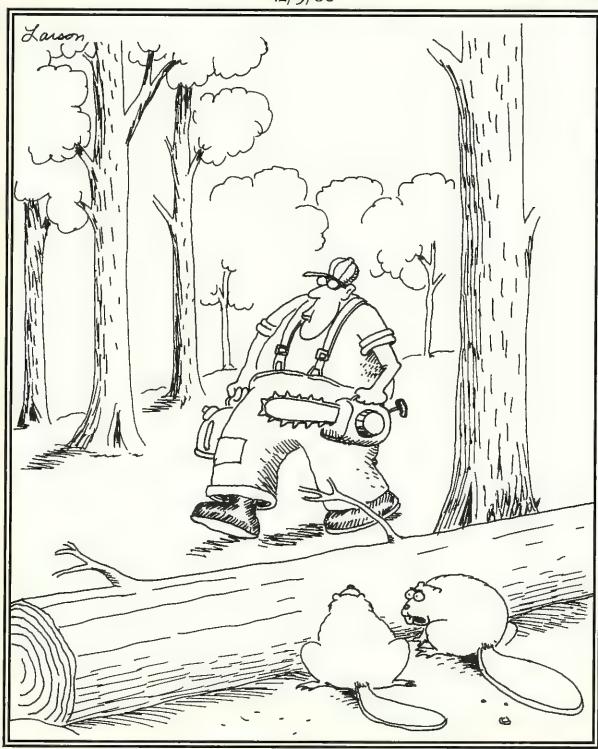


"The herring's nothin'. ... I'm going for the whole shmeer!"

12/12/80

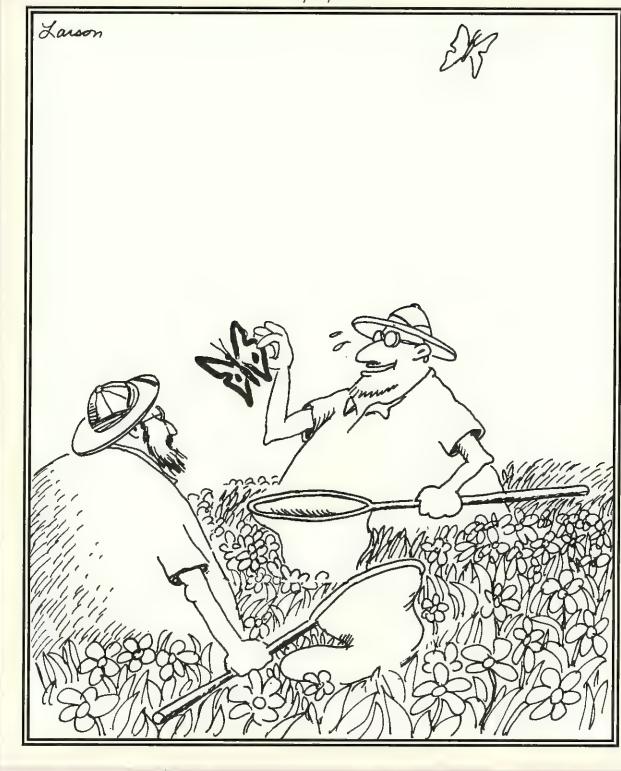


12/9/80



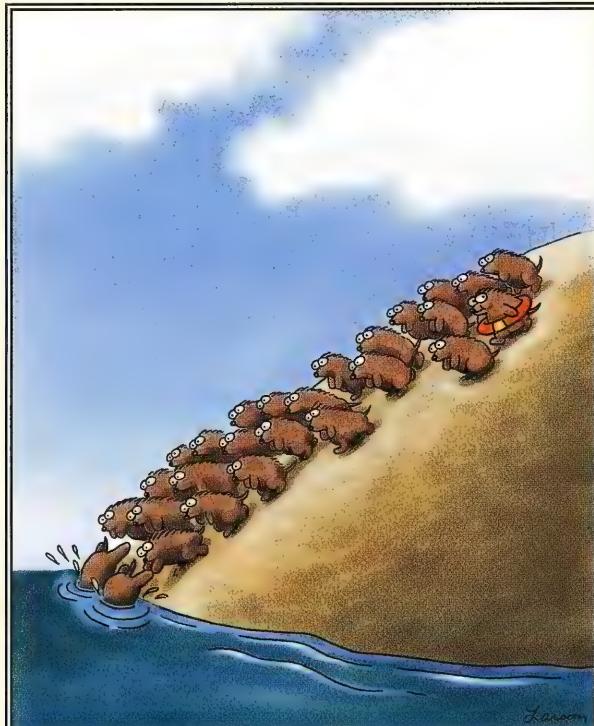
"Here he comes again ... and he's carrying the thundertooth."

12/10/80

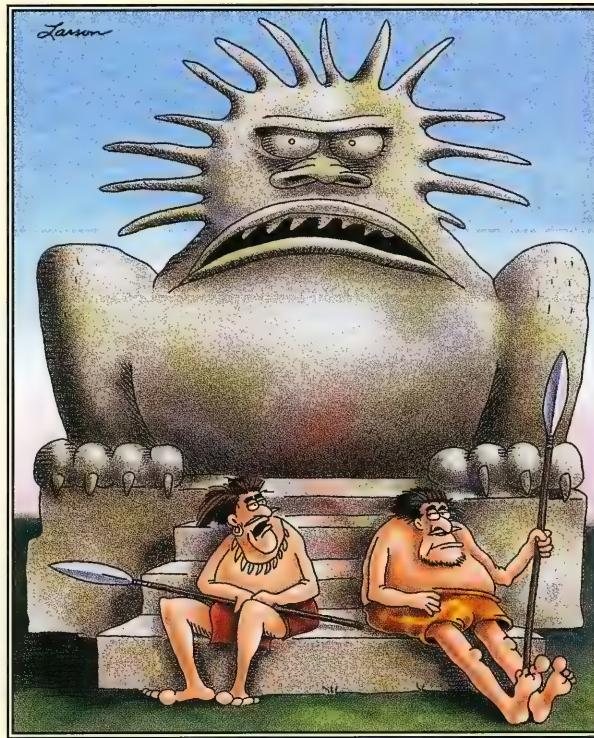


"An excellent specimen ... the symbol of beauty, innocence, and fragile life. ... Hand me the jar of ether."

12/15/80



12/17/80



"Twelve sacrifices already this week. ...  
Thank Goran it's Friday!"

12/11/80



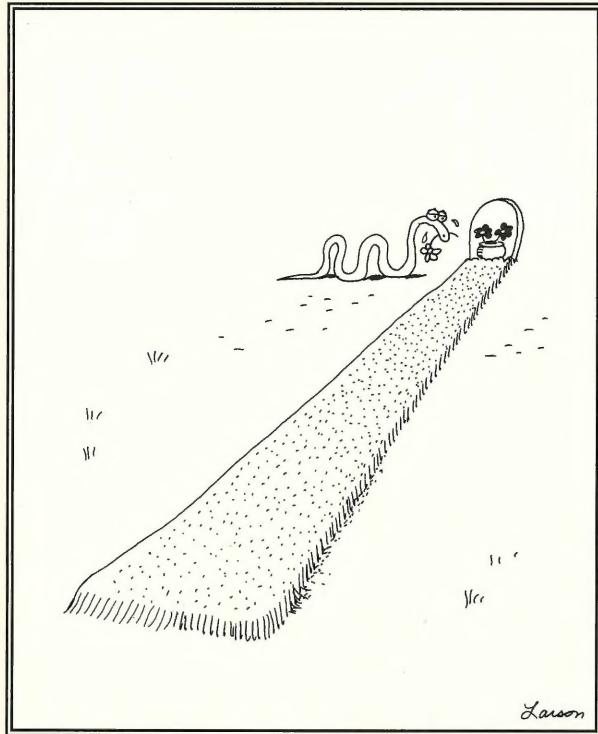
"Uh-oh—looks like the zipper has stuck on  
that thing again."

12/13/80

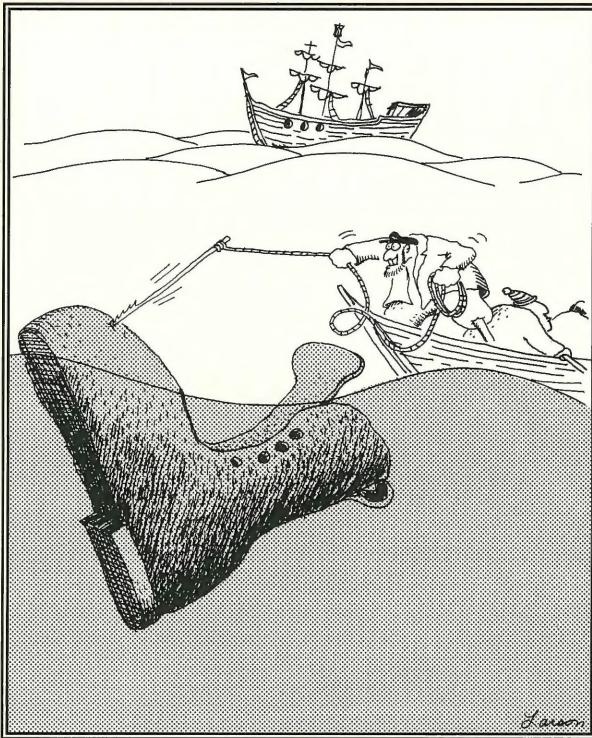


December 1980

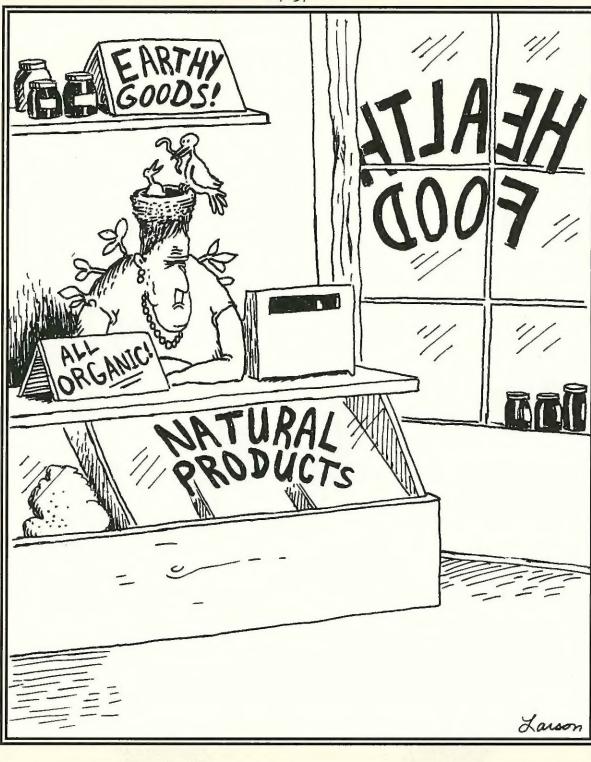
12/16/80



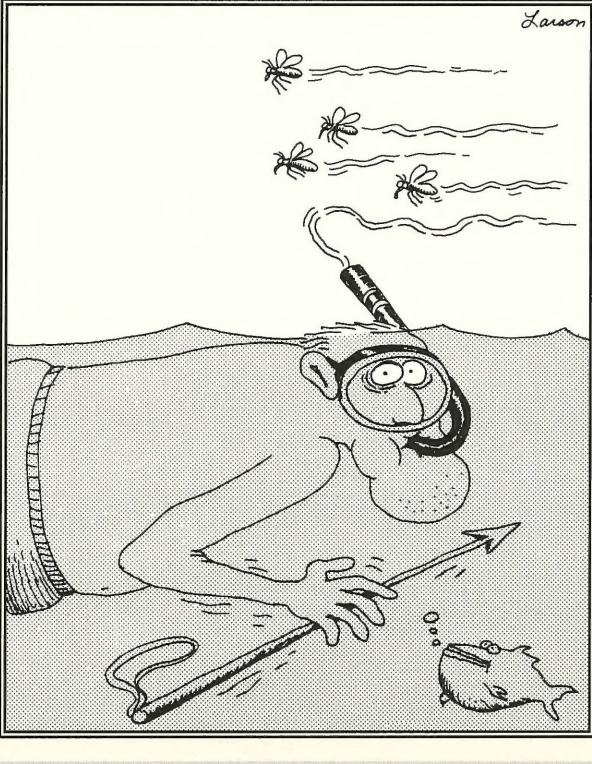
12/18/80



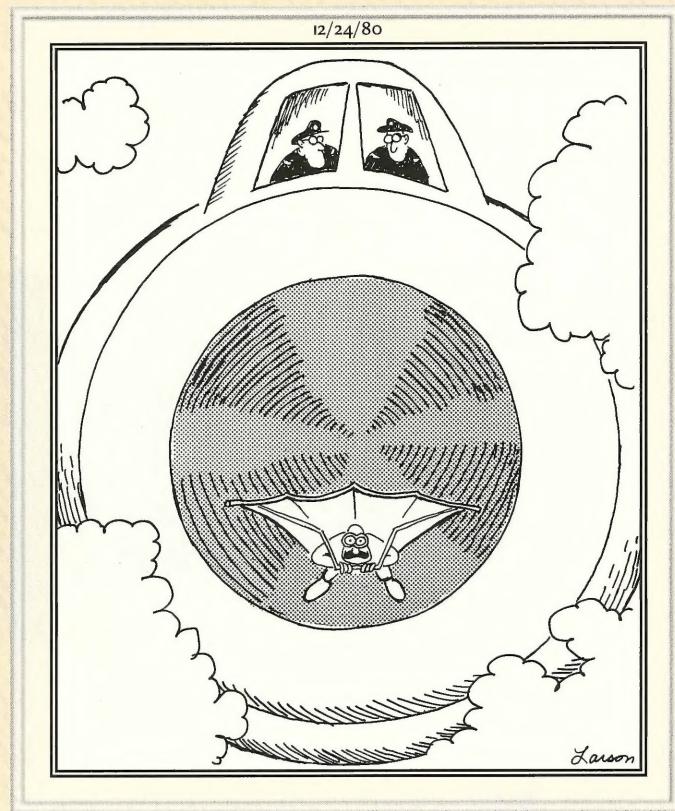
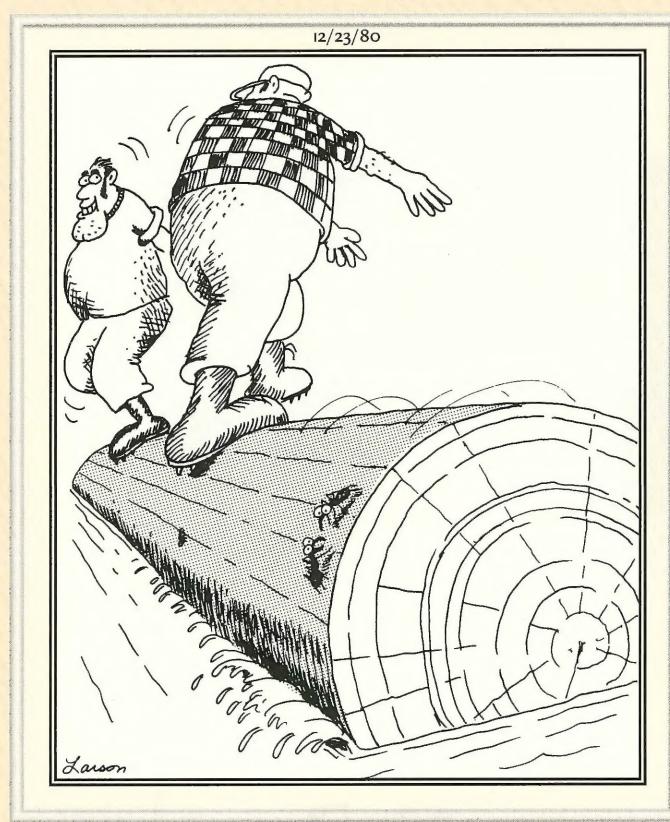
12/19/80



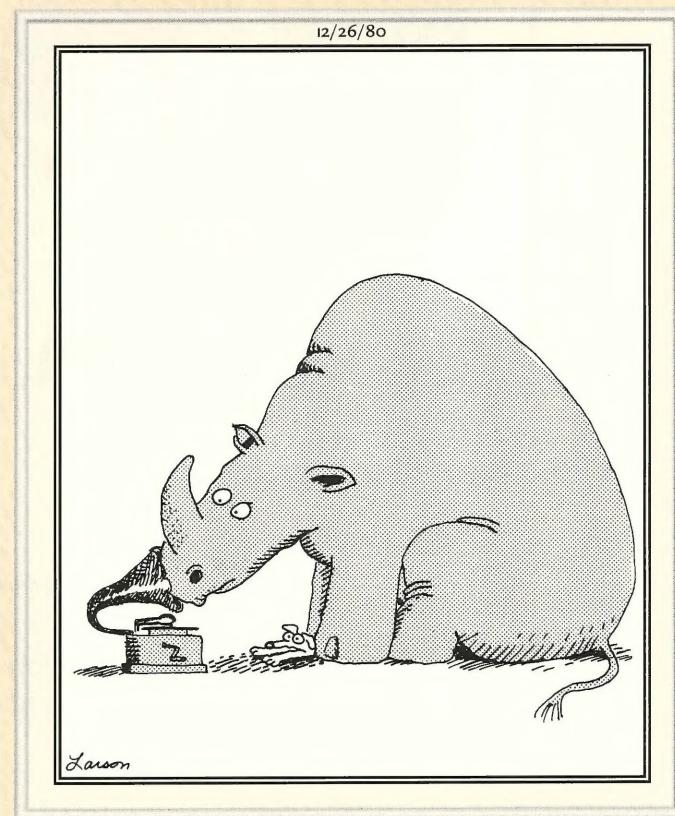
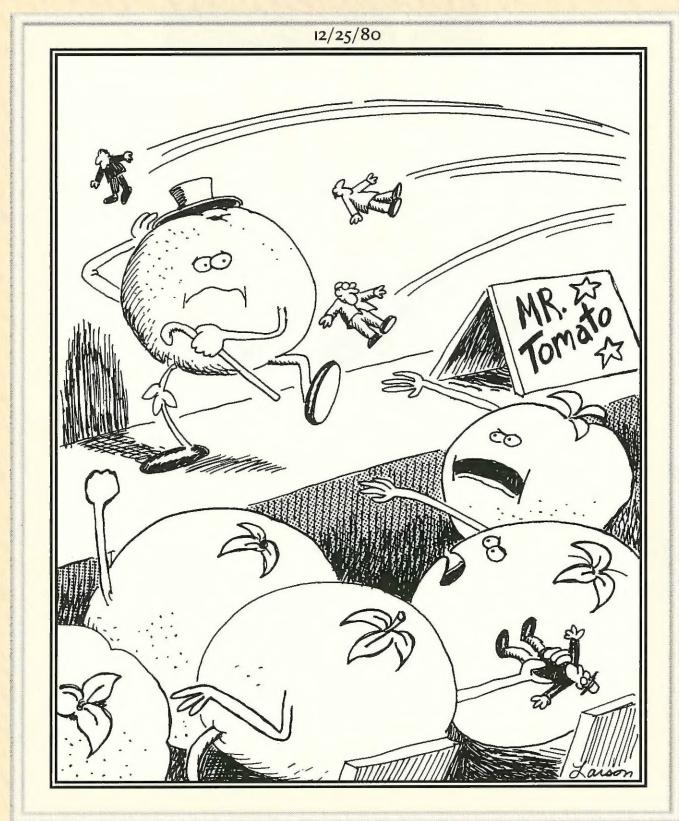
12/20/80



December 1980

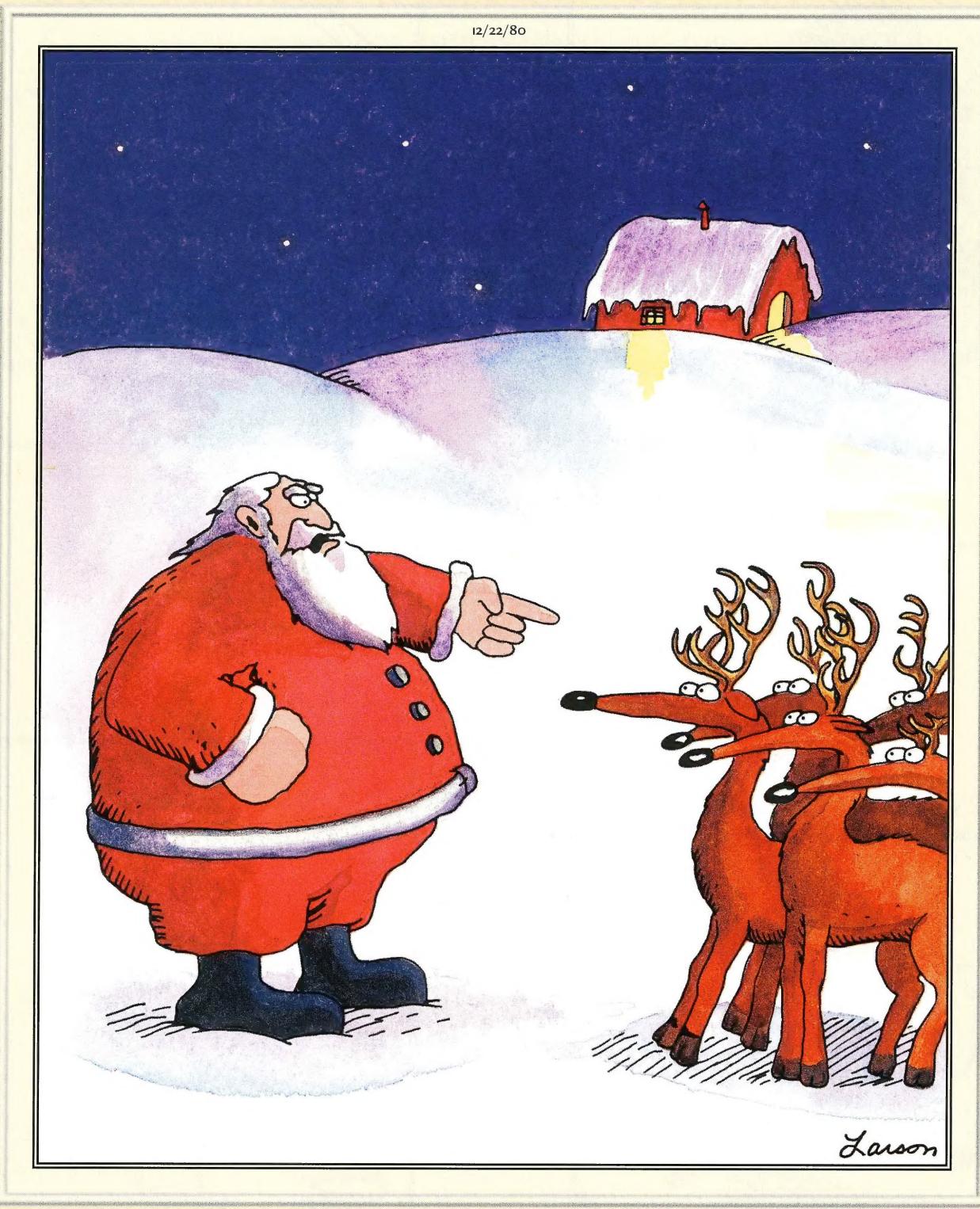


"Quick! Back the other way!  
Back the other way!"



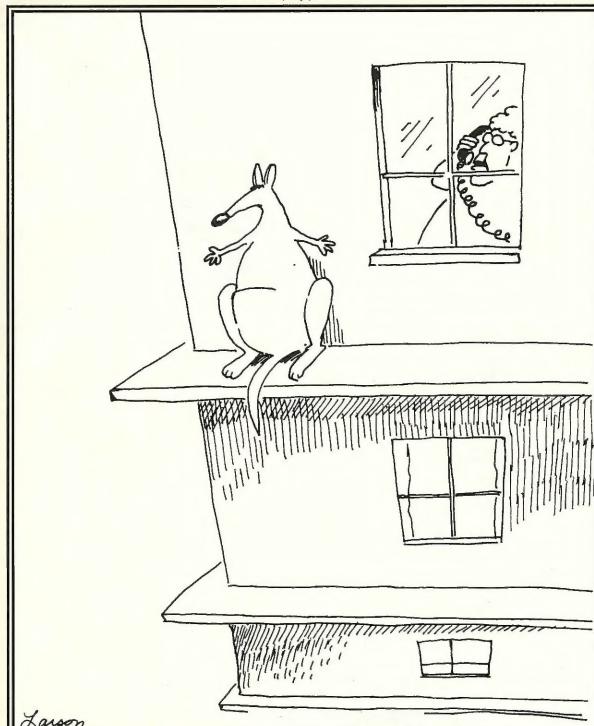
December 1980

12/22/80



"And I've only one thing to say about all these complaints I've been  
hearing about ... *Venison!*"

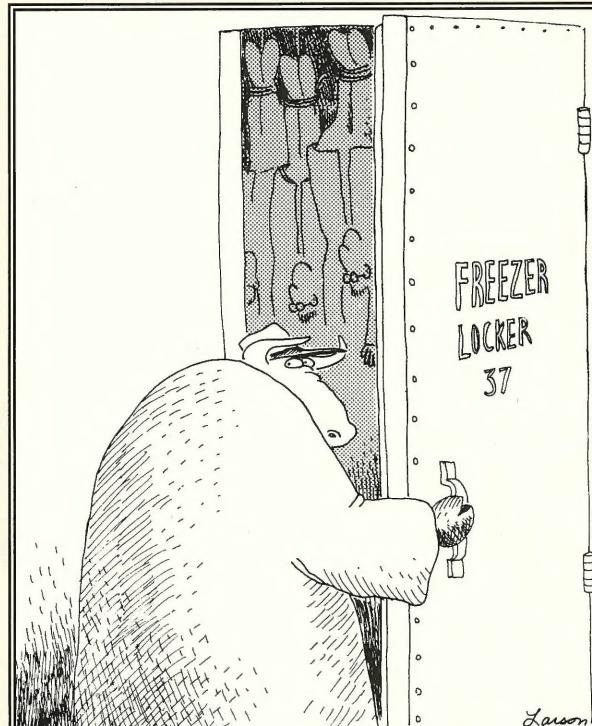
12/27/80



Larson

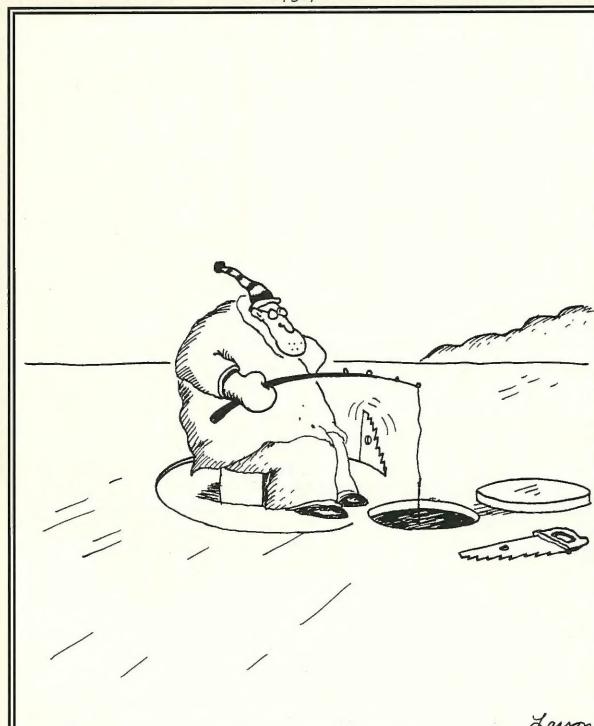
"Well, you better get someone over here right away. ... He really looks like he's going to jump."

12/29/80



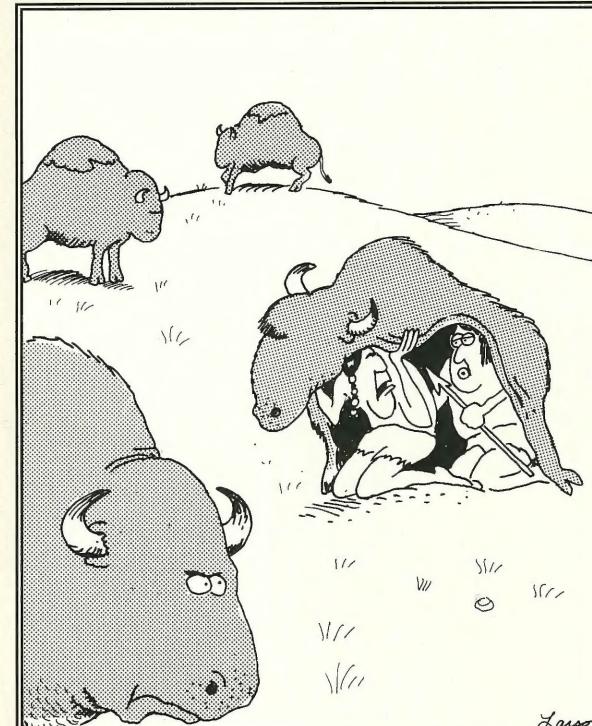
Larson

12/30/80



Larson

12/31/80



Larson

"I said act nonchalant—that doesn't mean whistling!"